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THE ACTOR'S SON.

A Story of Trials and Triumphs On
and Off the Stage.

By GUS WILLIAMS.



The murderous Italian plucked a stiletto from his breast, seized the needle-like point between the thumb and first finger of his right hand, and lifted it above his head to hurl it at the helpless victim.

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THE ACTOR'S SON.

A Story of Trials and Triumphs On and Off the Stage.

By GUS WILLIAMS.

CHAPTER I.

"FRANK SPARKLE."

"Yes, sir."

"Come here."

The voice was that of Professor Whackboy, founder of the academy, for youth of the male sex, bearing his name, and thus admonished, Frank, a bright, intelligent lad of eighteen, arose from his seat, and walked up to the professor's desk.

"You called me, sir," he said, after he had remained silent for some seconds without any apparent desire upon the part of the principal who had summoned him to open a conversation.

Professor Whackboy glanced at him over his spectacles, and his thick brows contracted sternly.

"Yes; I have received a letter relating to you, and also one from your father. The latter calls you from school, and if the former is correct, I cannot say, sir, other than it is most welcome, for it would spare me the pain of expelling you."

Frank's face flushed.

"What have I done, sir?" he demanded hotly.

Professor Whackboy coughed lightly.

"Nothing," he said, with a freezing air; "but this letter to which I allude informs me that your father follows that disgraceful profession of, hem—an actor! Is this true?"

Frank Sparkle's face flushed and paled by turns.

"Well?" he asked, coldly.

"Is this true?" re-demanded the learned gentleman.

"It is, sir; and I am proud to own it!"

"That is sufficient, sir. You are no longer a pupil of mine; as I before remarked, your father has sent for you; in fact, he is dying."

"Dying!" repeated Frank, turning very pale.

"Precisely. And although I wish no man ill, I can only say it is better thus than that he should further pursue those disreputable duties—"

Professor Whackboy never finished the sentence.

Quick as a flash, Frank Sparkle leaped forward, seized a heavy inkstand, and hurled it at him.

It whizzed through the air, struck him fairly in the mouth, and cut the sentence short.

Naturally quiet and passive, Frank was like a lion when his father's name was assailed; for he loved the old comedian more than sons are wont to love parents, and I may be pardoned if I say, I think, just then, Prof. Whackboy got an inkling of how deep and true that affection really was.

The school burst into a roar; the ink bubbled from the lips of the professor, streaming down the bosom of his heretofore spotless shirt, and plucking up his cane, he leaped to his feet and flourished it over the boy.

Frank Sparkle's fist clenched, and there was an ominous light in his eye; so ominous, that the learned and ink-begrimed man lowered the rattan as the boy said:

"Don't you dare to strike me; I am no longer under your control, and I have served you as I would any other person of questionable respectability who attacked the name of my father!"

"Leave the house, sir," yelled the infuriated man, pointing toward the door.

Frank merely bowed his head, and with great dignity, strode into the hallway and up to his own dormitory.

In half an hour a stage bore him down the road to the depot, followed by the ringing

cheers of the boys, among whom he was a favorite.

He rose up, waved them good-by, then the stage swept around a bend in the road and he had left Whackboy Academy forever.

He reached the depot, paid the stage-driver and strolled into the station.

"How long before the next train leaves for New York?" he asked, as he purchased his ticket.

"Twenty minutes, sir," was the agent's reply.

He thanked the man, drew back to a seat in the corner, and lost himself in thought.

What did it all mean? He had received a letter from his father but three days before, wherein he expressed himself enjoying the best of health, and now to hear thus suddenly of his approaching death, was bitter and strange indeed.

It seemed to him that the train would never come, and he caught himself repeating: "Sixty seconds make one minute," etc.

At length the iron-monster thundered into the depot, and with a sigh of relief, Frank picked up his valise and entered the car.

The ride to New York was not an extremely lengthy one, although the scenery was most beautiful: but the lad had no eye for it to-day, and when the train rumbled into the great metropolis, he leaped gladly out and hailed a hack.

"Drive me to No.—Bleecker street," he said, as he sprang feverishly in and was rattled away to his destination.

Night had fallen, bringing with it a drizzling mist, and when Frank reached his father's home, he was surprised to see it enveloped in darkness.

He sprang out, darted past a couple of men who were lounging near the door and ran up the hallway.

Reaching the upper landing, he knocked on the landlady's door and asked for his father.

"Lawk's sir," was the woman's reply, "he left for the theater half an hour ago."

"But—but I thought he was dying!"

"Never was better in his life—that is since I've known him, and that's twenty years—long before my Nell died, and—"

Doubtless Mrs. Brophy would have gone on in this strain all night, but Frank cut her short by asking:

"Did he say he expected me?"

"Not a blessed word, sir."

"Thank you; I will leave my valise here, and take a stroll down to the theater."

The mysterious letter puzzled him greatly, and as he turned into the Bowery, he muttered to himself:

"Confound it! what does it all mean? Did Whackboy get it up as an excuse for expelling me? Hang it all! I'll find out what dad has to say before I'm a day older, and—"

His remarks were cut short by a flower girl yelling her wares in his ear.

He bought a white rose, fastened it in his button-hole, and strolled down towards the theater, followed, although he knew it not then, by the same two men who lounged around the door of his father's boarding-house.

At the time of which I am writing, the Old Bowery was in the heyday of its popularity. Its massive walls resounded to the bellow of the mighty Forrest, the graceful faces and finished acting of Julia Dean, Susan Denin and countless lights of more or less brilliancy in the theatrical world; but come who might, a Booth or a Howe, none found a heartier reception from the packed house than the ever popular Sam Sparkle, whose flashes of sentiment, dashes of comedy, high or low;

from the "Mock Duke" in the "Honeymoon" to "Jacob Earwig" in "Boots at the Swan," were the delight of the circles and the joy of the pit.

Frank was passionately fond of the stage—in fact, he had long settled upon it as the pursuit of his life, and was "up" in the juveniles of many of the popular plays of the day, from Shakespeare down to Clifton Whey.

As he passed the brilliant entrance of the theater, he saw that the bill of the night was "Romeo and Juliet," supplemented by the farce of "Turn Him Out."

He noted this with a smile, for the "Nicomachus Nobbs" of Sam Sparkle was a performance never to be forgotten for its broad slices of fun, and then strolled around to the back door.

The gruff, grumpy old door-keeper glanced up as he entered.

The play had not begun, and the whole house was in a hubbub. Men ran hither and thither; walking gents in crimson hauberks, and pretty ballet girls in court trains, designed especially for the halls of the crusty Capulet; stage carpenters cursed and swore at wings and set pieces, supers mumbled and talked lowly to one another, and amidst it all, a short, thick-set, spectacled man, with a prompt-book in his hand, flitted around the men and questioned.

Now and then he caught the words:

"Won't you, Taylor, or you, Baker, or Roche, or Kennedy? A week's salary to the one who speaks first. D—r it; the house is full; we can't send 'em away!"

Then each man shook his head, and each man in turn, replied:

"Not up in it. It would damn me forever, and I'd never be able to show my face again in New York."

Frank turned from these and asked the door-keeper:

"Can I see Mr. Sparkle?"

"Not yet; he's dressing."

"But I am his son; I must see him."

"Can't help it, sir; call again; there's no time to be wasted now."

"But—"

"It's no use talking, you can't see him now."

But I tell you I must see—"

The man arose and pushed open the door.

The boy had just taken a step forward, when a man strolled upon the stage.

It was Sam Sparkle made up for Peter, and raising his voice, Frank shouted:

"Dad!"

The comedian turned, saw him, and darted forward.

"By Jove! it couldn't have been better; the very one!"

He tapped the stage manager on the shoulder and whispered a few words in his ear; his face lit up and he called to the doorkeeper, Jenkins:

"Let that young man in."

Frank came forward, seized his father's hand and was about to speak, when the stage manager, the short man in spectacles, said, quickly:

"Don't waste time in words. Are you up in Romeo? That beastly Burns is drunk as a fool and can't speak a line."

Frank's face lit up; he glanced at his father, and he too asked:

"I know you are up in it. Will you play it?"

"But—"

Whistling and stamping could be heard from the front—the audience were getting impatient.

"No buts about it. Will you play?"

"Yes."

"Then tear down-stairs like mad."

The old man hustled him past, the comedian whisked him down into a dressing-room where tights, symmetries, swords, feathers, hauberks, shapes, shirts and even togas lay piled about in direst confusion.

"Don't stop to tell me how you came to leave school, but pile in and make up. There's flake white, here's chalk and rouge, there's a hare's foot and a lining brush. Here's some cosmetic or India ink, which ever you wish. Sail in, and if you don't do me credit and lay all over that milk and water Burns, I'll disown you."

All around was bustle and confusion.

He heard the call boy summons:

"First act: everybody up to begin!" he heard the bray of the instruments in the orchestra, felt himself slipped into a blue and white hauberk, and as one in a dream, drew the strap still closer around his tights, slid his feet into a pair of cross straps, blue slippers, and put the last touch of rouge on his cheeks—so confused that he attempted a dozen things at once.

"Hurry up—hurry up!"

"Come now!"

"Quick there!"

These words met him upon every side, and amid the bustle and confusion the rustle of the ascending curtain was heard.

He worked on faster, buckled on his sword, bent back his plume and hastened up the stairs.

"Just in time," he heard the stage manager say. "There's your cue—go on!"

Handsome, well-dressed and majestic, he strode forward upon the stage.

There was a moment's pause; the lights seemed to spin around, then the house broke into cheers, and he heard swell up from the throng, like a million throats:

"Hi—hi—bravo—Sparkle—Sparkle!"

CHAPTER II.

FOR a moment Frank was astounded to hear his name, but he soon after learned that the stage manager had apologized for the non-appearance of Mr. Burns, "owing to severe indisposition, and his part would be essayed by Mr. Frank Sparkle, son of the eminent comedian."

He seemed to live in a dream, but in a few seconds he warmed up to his work, and "carried the house," breathless, with his every movement.

His heart leaped with joy, his face was flushed, his blood tingled; while even old actors lounged at the wings and followed the young lover with comments of praise from act to act throughout the entire play.

But all were on the *qui vive* for the celebrated balcony scene and when the act-drop rustled softly upward a death-like stillness swept over the whole house.

The scene was a master-piece.

He stood there in the center of the garden, the pale, bluish light of the calcium moon streaming on his white hauberk, his young, handsome face turned towards the vine-draped balcony, over which hung the lovely "Juliet," and as the scene grew the silence deepened.

Suddenly Frank heard a low, agonizing gasp from the wings, and as he cast a backward glance, he saw Sam Sparkle clutch the profile edge, his face white as ashes, his lower jaw dropped, and his eyes fairly bulging from his head.

For a moment our hero forgot his lines.

That pale, painful face burned into his very soul; but another sound attracted his attention to the proscenium box.

A hand swept aside the lace curtain, a tall, handsome man arose in the box, and hurled a bunch of white roses at the very feet of the young actor.

Another low gurgle from Sam Sparkle, the eyes of the two men met, and with a cold, cynical smile, he in the box raised his hat.

The curtain fell back again, but not before Frank had seen another form in the rear of the box, and recognized both.

They were the two men he had seen in Bleecker street.

"By Jove!" he muttered, "I have seen those men before."

For a moment it troubled him, then was forgotten in the excitement.

He meant to ask the comedian who they were when he left the stage, but in the bustle

and confusion of dressing, he forgot all about it.

Nevertheless, the men would not allow themselves to be forgotten; for their cheers were the heartiest, their bravos the loudest; and often Frank felt his eyes wander towards them, strive how he might to keep them away, and once or twice he caught himself wishing they would go.

At times his gaze would wander to the wings, and he would see the old comedian leaning against the proscenium with his eyes riveted upon the strangers, and his face dead-white.

All this combined, rendered it still more uncomfortable for the debutant, but he shook off the feeling, and drove at his work with renewed vigor and spirit that seemed to tell upon the audience, and elicited cheers where they were least expected.

* * * * *

The curtain had fallen upon the tragic ending of the great play, and while all was in bustle and confusion for the farce, Frank wended his way to his dressing-room and silently doffed his sable robes.

The bunch of white roses lay beside him, and as he picked them up, a slip of paper fluttered to the floor.

He raised it, and read:

"Philip Deverell presents his compliments to the actor, and—the actor's son."

"What the deuce does he mean by underscoring the last three words?" mused Frank. "Hang the man! I don't know him!"

The farce was soon over, and Sam Sparkle came down the stairs, looking blue and down-cast.

While he was disrobing, Frank told him the story of the mysterious letter, and was not surprised to find that the comedian knew nothing of it.

However, the man's face grew pale as ashes, and as he caught sight of the paper, he snatched it up and read it hastily.

"I knew it—I knew it!" he groaned, as he crushed the paper in his hand. "There's danger afoot after all these years. Oh, my poor boy!"

Frank looked at him in surprise; he had never seen the old comedian so much affected, and he hastened to inquire the cause.

"Ask me nothing now," returned Sparkle, "but look to yourself, and be careful for the love of Heaven."

"But why, dad? Of what?"

"You will know soon enough, lad—you must know, it is better. Oh, my God! that this should happen! That he should appear living—when I had so long thought him dead! It would have been better so—it would—"

"Good-evening, Mr. Sparkle."

He turned as he was saluted, and saw the man who had been in the box standing on the threshold of his dressing-room.

One would imagine it impossible for a face to grow so pale as did Samuel Sparkle's at that sight, and he stammered as he turned away.

"How—came—you down here, Philip Deverell?"

The dark man smiled, showing an even set of teeth, and sank into a chair.

"Not a very graceful way to meet a fellow after all these years. Mr. Frank, you have grown a fine lad, and a capital actor, but I thought you died nearly eighteen years ago. Didn't you, Sam?"

He spoke those last words with a cold, chilling emphasis, and the comedian shivered from head to foot.

Philip Deverell laughed sardonically, and continued:

"What a rogue you were, Sparkle, to send your boy to school and hide him from the world with all his theatrical talent—worse, too," and the man's voice grew harsher still, "to give the world to believe that he died in early infancy!"

"For God's sake, Deverell!" moaned Sparkle, turning his eyes upon the man with an imploring glance.

Meanwhile Frank had stood a surprised listener to the conversation, and turning quickly, the comedian said to him:

"Go up-stairs and search around the stage for the buckle I lost from my shoe in the tragedy."

Without a word, Frank obeyed him, and then the scene in the dressing-room took a stronger turn.

"So you have deceived me!" hissed Deverell, glaring at the comedian. "Now, see

here, Sparkle, all this business for which you have been paid might have been done easily years ago. It is harder now, but by—it must be done all the same!"

"Mercy, Deverell, mercy!"

"Mercy!" foamed the infuriated man. "How dare you ask it at my hands, Samuel Sparkle? Do my bidding—kill this son of yours—hark ye—kill him, or by—the law will clutch you as firmly as—"

"Oh, for God's sake, Deverell!" gasped Sparkle, holding his hands up before his face.

Philip Deverell arose and bent his lips down to the actor's ear.

"You are in my power, Sam Sparkle," he heard, "and you shall do my bidding or go to the scaffold. Do you think I have forgotten that night in the road? Do you think I have forgotten that poor creature pleading for her life while the blood streamed down her face? Do you think I have forgotten that last crushing blow which mashed through her head and laid her lifeless at your feet? Do you think—"

"Don't—don't, for the love of Heaven!" moaned the wretched man, clasping his hand over Deverell's mouth and glancing around. "Walls have ears; keep my secret and—come again—I will talk with you then."

"But will you promise to put this boy out of the way? Remember, you sign your own death-warrant by your refusal."

For a moment the comedian wavered between two opinions, then he shook his head, feebly.

Deverell's brow grew dark.

"You refuse?" he gasped.

"Yes; do with me as you will, but out on the very trap of the scaffold, I will denounce you, Philip Deverell. Take care, you may tempt and try me, but you will find me true to the death. Go, do your worst! I can die but once," then his voice sank to a whisper, and he continued: "and I can murder but once! Once, said I? No, twice! You have goaded me on, Philip Deverell, until I am desperate; leave me, or I may be tempted to repeat the scene you witnessed in the dark road! Go!"

The tempter saw that he was desperate, and crept towards the door.

"It is war then?" he asked.

"To the death!"

"I will see you again; I will give you a week for reflection—"

"I want it not."

"Then look out for me."

The door slammed sharply to; he was gone.

The actor sank back in the chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Oh, my poor boy," he moaned, "oh, my poor boy!"

At that instant he caught the echo of Frank's footstep upon the stairs, and springing up, he began dressing at all speed, humming while he worked.

"Can't find the buckle, dad," said Frank, as he entered the room.

"Never mind, it is here. You've done well to-night, my boy, and you have the juveniles for the rest of the season, for refusal or acceptance. You've made many friends, my boy, but you've made one bitter enemy."

"Who is that?" asked Frank, glancing up in surprise.

"The man who was here—the man who gave you these!" flinging down the roses and grinding them under his feet. "Shun him, boy, as you would a serpent! Be careful, watch, wait, be faithful, or, as surely as you are living to-night, he will sting you in the dark! Those roses are a signal of danger. Beware!"

"Of what, dad?"

"A nameless danger, my boy. But come what may, promise me you will never think too harshly of your old dad."

Frank seized his hand and shook it firmly. "How could I, dad? You have been good to me, and but for this shadow we should have been so happy."

"Ay, so happy!" repeated the actor, and then he spoke no more until they were home.

Thrice he strained Frank to his heart, and the tears from the old eyes dripped down on the handsome young face of the boy, then he put him from him and bade him go to rest.

Once alone, he sat down and began writing.

"I'll make notes," he muttered. "They may be of use to the boy if—I die. I can't tell him the story with my lips, and when they are still and cold these pages may speak. God pity me and Satan curse you, Philip

Deverell, with your handsome, fiendish face. There is villainy afoot—but what? Oh, a sibyl could not more plainly foresee the future than I do now!"

CHAPTER III.

NIGHT after night Frank Sparkle continued to act, to the intense delight of crowded houses, and night after night that bunch of white rosebuds fell at the young actor's feet.

"Romeo and Juliet" had passed its run, and a great spectacle was in preparation in which Frank enacted a prominent character.

The night when this great spectacle was to be first unfolded to the public was the last night of grace accorded by Philip Deverell to Samuel Sparkle, and the old comedian dreaded each hour as it passed, fearful of the consequences of that man's threat.

Still he was not disturbed, but could he have seen Deverell that afternoon, his fears would have been increased threefold.

It might have been half-past three o'clock when the man left his abode and strolled leisurely down to the Five Points.

At this period it was not a common sight to see an elegantly dressed man in the vicinity of the old brewery, and many eyes were turned upon him as he came down the filthy thoroughfare.

Reaching the dingy red house, Deverell darted in and picked his way to the upper story.

It was evident he was known here, for upon reaching the door facing him as he mounted, he turned the knob and strode boldly in.

A dark, sinister-looking fellow was lying on an apology for a bed, but sprang up as Deverell entered.

"Howa youa do, Mr. Deverell?"

"Oh, I'm all square. St. Gash, I want you to do a bit of work for me. You remember that youngster at the Bowery the other night?"

"De von you trowa de flowers?"

"Yes."

Giovanni St. Gash nodded his head.

Deverell continued:

"You are pretty good at flinging a knife, I hear, Giovanni, but in all the years we have been together I have never put that to the test. Now the business I want you to undertake is—"

He bent down and whispered in the Italian's ear. St. Gash was an old hand at scenes of bloodshed, an old slave of Philip Deverell, and he merely smiled, as the other laid out his plans, but that smile meant acceptance of the terms.

"Ver' goot; I nevair miss a my mark. I will be there on the time."

"Remember," continued Deverell, as he arose to go, "not till the play is well on, and then in the confusion, aim at him at whose feet falls a bunch of white roses."

The Italian nodded his head, and the arch plotter took his departure.

Night came on, and father and son wended their way to the theater, beneath whose brilliant light crowds were surging in, eager to get seats; not one dreaming of the tragic ending that night to "Raymond and Agnes."

As a spectacle, this play can scarcely be surpassed; and the glowing, red-lettered bills and flaming cuts, from quarter sheets to threes, lured the playgoers to the grand old house in hundreds.

Meanwhile, Giovanni St. Gash had bought himself into the graces of the super-master, and in the dingy old room set apart for the supernumeraries, was arranging himself for the performance.

"How is the house?" asked Frank, as he came upon the stage.

"She's a ripper; look for yourself."

The young actor applied his eye to the hole in the curtain, and viewed the vast sea of faces.

Boxes, pit, circles—all were jammed to suffocation, and Frank felt his breast swell with pride at the assemblage he was to face.

The last note of the overture had died away as he drew back, and a slight rustle ran through the audience.

"Clear stage!" came the cry of the prompter, accompanied by a sharp clap of the hands; then the bell rang briskly, and with a heavy rustle the curtain went up, and the first act had begun of the great spectacle that was doomed yet to be swept out in flames and mourned in tears.

Frank Sparkle played that night as he had never done before, and at length the master

scene came wherein both his father and himself were upon the stage.

"Now is a ma time!" hissed St. Gash, and while all eyes were riveted upon the stage, he struck a match and applied it to the old canvas.

Wilder and wilder grew the scene, louder and louder swelled the applause, and happy, smiling faces were seen upon every side.

"Hi—hil bravo—bravo."

Then a thrill of horror; a long insidious tongue of flame lapped up and fired the borders, the audience sprang to their feet, tumbled like sheep towards the doors, and while women screamed and fainted, and men cursed and swore, high above the din rang the awful cry of:

"Fire!"

In the twinkling of an eye, the old, frayed canvas was enveloped in sheets of flame, while knife in hand, St. Gash awaited the signal of the roses.

The crash and splinter of glass as the maddened creatures leaped from the windows could be heard, and amid that hell of sound, Philip Deverell arose and hurled the bunch of roses at the stage.

At that instant the actors, cognizant of their peril, had started to fly, and the bouquet fell at the feet of—Sam Sparkle!

"Sacre!" hissed Giovanni, and hurled the stiletto forward.

It whizzed through the fire, circled in mid air; then a loud cry broke above the hellish din, and with the hilt peering from his blood-stained bosom, Sam Sparkle reeled backward and fell crashing down among the flames?

CHAPTER IV.

THE broad sheets of flame curled and lapped around the tinder-like scenery, the wood-work and canvas blazed and smoked, and above all arose the unearthly shrieks of wounded, frightened and dying men, women and children.

Even in the midst of that miniature pandemonium, Philip Deverell saw the fatal mistake the Italian had made—a mistake for which no one was to blame—and leaped up from his seat.

But it was too late to recall the blow, too late to seek out St. Gash and acquaint him of it.

"Maledictions!" hissed the plotter, "he will escape us after all. The man whom I would have live is killed, but safety now demands my attention."

He sprang boldly into the struggling, screaming mass and beat his way to the door.

Escape by that quarter was entirely cut off, for, in their mad haste, the people had crowded into the lobby and were jammed together in a solid body, only able to scream and curse while others clambered over their heads, trampled upon them, beat them from their hold, until, from wall to wall, from floor to ceiling, was one solid mass of squirming limbs.

"Good God!" gasped Deverell, "have I trapped myself?"

By this time the flames had reached the auditorium; balconies and circles were converted into crackling bodies of fire, the dense black smoke was suffocating many of the miserable beings, and the flames scorching as many more.

"Furies! I must get out of this!" shrieked Deverell, as he beat his way back into the theater's center.

Right and left his blows fell, and nerved with a horrible desperation, he flung the struggling wretches from his path.

From where he stood he could see a vacant window upon the gallery above, and rushing at all speed towards one of the supports, he wound his arms around it and prepared to clamber up.

"Save me, oh, my God! save!" shrieked a woman, tottering forward, and grasping his coat.

"D—n you! let go!" he hissed, as he dealt her a heavy blow on her upturned face.

The blood trickled down from her nose and mouth, but she still clung to him and cried:

"Oh, for God's sake, save me! Think of my little ones at home; think—"

He slid back from the pillar, stooped, tore the woman from her grasp, and lifting her bodily in the air, hurled her over the edge of the gallery, and into the very midst of the flames below.

One single shriek rent the air as the circled over and over in her downward flight, then

she disappeared in the dense, black smoke with a heavy crash.

Deverell again began the ascent.

By this time the fire-engines had reached the scene of the conflagration, and dense bodies of water splashed through the broken windows, deluging the miserable wretches, and falling on the flaming wood with a fierce, heavy splutter.

Deverell reached the gallery above, clambered over the seats to the window, reaching which, he dashed away the glass with his clenched fist, and wriggled through, gashed and bleeding, to the stone sill.

The blaze lit up the place with a light that rivaled the brilliancy of noonday.

Below, the streets were thronged with people, the fire-engines buzzed and shrieked, and bending forward, Deverell espied a shed some twenty feet below.

Suddenly a howl went up upon the night air; the people had seen him—were pointing at him—and as his bloodshot eyes turned towards them, he saw the firemen lugging forward a ladder.

The stones upon which he clung were becoming too hot to hold, and he waved his hands above his head in a despairing appeal for aid.

At that moment a dull rumble was heard, followed closely by a splitting sound; the walls rocked and heaved, then the roof fell inward with a heavy crash, mashing the crowds below, and against the brilliant background his slender form stood out in bold relief.

"Save me! Save me!" he shrieked, forgetting in his despair the poor creature whose appeal for aid he had answered by death.

The next instant the broad sheets of flame swung up towards him, curled around his body, and he saw that another moment's delay would be fatal.

Crouching down, he measured the distance to the shed below, and with a fearful oath of blasphemy, leaped forward into space.

His body whizzed through the air, he landed upon the tin with a heavy sound and overpowered with horror. The moment he realized he was safe, he fell back with a low gurgle, senseless.

A groan went up from the throng at that fearful leap for life, and willing hands lifted the ladder to the shed and brought the inanimate man down.

"Poor fellow! he's dead," someone said, but such they soon found out was not the case. Better—far better would it have been for Frank Sparkle had it been so, but the devil never deserts his own, and Phillip Deverell was one of his most devoted subjects.

Inside of twenty minutes he had recovered his senses, and mingled with the crowd gazing at the crumbling ruin, and wondering if Frank Sparkle had fallen within it.

CHAPTER V.

FRANK SPARKLE did not notice the comedian fall with that fatal stroke, but dashed wildly through the flames and with his brother actors, fled at all speed towards the back door.

The scene had been a box set, and in the twinkling of an eye the whole stage was surrounded with a wall of fire.

"For God's sake save me!" he heard one of the screaming ballet girls shriek, and stooping down, he wound his sinewy arms around her, and bore her safely to the street.

The fire engines had arrived, the red-shirted rescuers were doing all in their power to save the theater, but the dense crowds that jammed and blocked up the streets saw that this was useless—the house was doomed.

As Frank rejoined his brother actors, he saw for the first time the comedian was not there.

"Where's pop?" he cried, turning and facing the heavy man, who worked now with an energy that belied his calling.

"Good God! I don't know. I didn't see him come out. As sure as you live, Sparkle, he's in the theater yet!"

Frank waited to hear no more; he hurled the people from his path and dashed back towards the theater.

"Come back—come back!" a hundred voices shouted; he heeded them not, but sped towards the back door, out of which the smoke was rolling in dense, black clouds, and long, insidious tongues of flame darting like serpents' fangs.

He held his clothing over his mouth and leaped in.

Scarcely had he gone half a foot beyond the

threshold ere he felt himself seized from behind, and a fireman's voice yelled in his ear:

"Are you mad, man? You will be sacrificed!"

"I care not!" cried the brave boy. "My father is in there; I must get to him. Let me go!"

"No, by Heaven, I won't!"

"Let me go, I say!"

"Never! you—"

He turned, dealt the man a blow, wriggled from his grasp, and followed by a groan of despair from the lookers-on, leaped forward and disappeared in the flame and smoke.

Rafters and flaming scene frames fell on all sides of him, but he plunged boldly on, leaping each barrier as it fell, until he found himself surrounded by smoke and fire, past which it was impossible to see a single foot.

The border lights thundered down upon the stage, and at that instant he heard a cracking above him.

He looked up, uttered a terrified cry and leaped away.

Not an instant too soon, for, the flames having severed the ropes, the massive paint-bridge fell with a heavy crash upon the very spot where he had been standing.

He struggled upon the stage—his father was not there!

Desperate still, he darted to the winding stairs on the "O. P. side," and fled into the flies.

A window beyond was flung open, out of which the fly-man had just leaped, and as he passed by this, the brave boy was seen by those in the street, and cheered lustily.

Suddenly, however, their cheers changed to groans, for, right in their sight, a heavy timber had fallen upon his head and he lay senseless across the window-sill.

Quick as a flash a ladder was placed against the wall, and springing upon this, a fireman darted up and pulled him from the very jaws of death, as the roof fell inward!

For an instant man and boy are seen boldly by the livid light, then with the dense smoke surrounding them, the brave rescuer bears Frank in safety to the earth.

Poor Frank! he was saved from one peril, but he was menaced by a thousand more.

The eager crowds gathered around him, but the police beat them off.

"Open his clothing!"

"Stand back!"

"Give him air!"

"He is reviving."

These, and various other comments from the throng, met the bold boy's ears as his senses returned.

"Where am I? Where's dad?" he gasped, in a breath.

"Dunno," replied the fireman, who had saved him, shaking his head sadly; "p'raps dead—many another is."

"No, no, no! don't tell me that!" shrieked Frank, struggling to his feet. "He must be saved! I will go back after him, and—"

He stopped suddenly, the words froze on his lips, and with one glance at the theater, he reeled back and covered his eyes.

It was a heap of ruins.

"Oh, my God! he has perished! Dad—poor dad!"

Then he fell back into a man's arms, and a merciful unconsciousness blotted out all the horrors of his awful situation, and the frightful death that had overtaken Sam Sparkle with his comic laughter still warm upon his lips.

The wound in his head bled profusely.

An ambulance was summoned—a rude one—tender hands raised the poor fellow and he was driven to his home.

A surgeon dressed his wounds, administered an opiate, and left him to the watchful eyes and tender care of Mrs. Brophy, who, like all who knew him, had learned to love the lad.

In three days he was sufficiently strong to leave his bed, and at once began a search through his father's effects.

Among his private papers he found a torn sheet of foolscap, and upon this he read:

"—Deverell's power cannot be disputed, for

—but he shall not hurt one hair of the boy's

—I will defend him with my life. Oh,

—beware! his vengeance will pursue you to

—for you stand in his light to that great

—not see this till I am dead, and in my

—beware, boy, leave N. Y.; go anywhere, but escape

—he will kill you. Go! and do not think too harsh

—and may God forever bless you, and—"

There the paper ended.

It was one of the pages the comedian had written on the night of Frank's debut, and had torn asunder to re-write in another form.

Frank scratched his head in perplexity.

"Well, here's a jolly go! What the deuce could dad have meant? One thing is certain; he anticipated death at the hands of this Philip Deverell, and danger for me from the same quarter. It is plain he would have me flee from New York, and now that he is dead I shan't disrespect his wishes. Yes, I'll go—anywhere; tramp from town to town to escape this man; but beware, Philip Deverell, if the knowledge of the secret power you possessed over my father ever becomes known to me, I will hunt you to the ground with no more compunction than if you were a rat!"

"Rat! that's a fitting title for you, for did you steal into our happiness and snatch it from our very lips?"

"Only wait awhile; my day will come, never fear, and when it does, seek your hole, rat, and never show your head, if you don't want it nipped off on sight."

The boy's face was flushed as he concluded, and there was a light in his eyes that would not have pleased Mr. Philip Deverell could he have seen him just then.

However, Mr. Philip Deverell didn't get a chance to see him, and Frank Sparkle didn't mean that he should.

He rummaged further among the comedian's effects, fancying he might find more papers alluding to himself, but in this he was disappointed, for none could be found—not even the packet Sparkle had written on that fatal night, intended for Frank's eyes at this time.

He lingered a few days in town, but when his money was all gone, came to the conclusion that he must find something to do; but as he respected his father's wishes, that "something" must not be procured in New York.

"There is no help for it," he moaned; "I must tramp my way west and enter some of the theaters there. I can do odd jobs along the road and thus save myself from starvation."

Accordingly he picked out a few wigs, a couple of "shapes," a pair of tights, some stage jewels, and a pair of shoes.

These he made into a bundle, tied them to the end of a stout walking-stick, and sat down to write a letter to Mrs. Brophy.

He did not wish to tell her of his reasons for leaving the city, and he knew that were he to tell her in person that he was going, this explanation could hardly be escaped.

Night came on, and the young actor sat alone in his desolate apartment watching the clock on the mantel, and counting the hours before he must depart from a danger he knew no more of than that it existed; but in what shape, and what the reason might be for its assuming any form, he was totally ignorant.

He had only the old comedian's words to guide him: "It is a nameless peril, my boy," and from this strange danger, this peril without a name he was fleeing—fleeing, ignorant of its direction, and knowing not whether he was going from it or walking blindly into its embrace.

It was a perplexing situation.

The hours came and went, and at midnight our hero arose, slipped the letter under Mrs. Brophy's door, and passed down the hallway and into the street.

"I have no guide," he muttered, "but the railroad tracks, and may Heaven watch over me!"

Then he shouldered his stick, passed on through the city, and followed the glistening rails that were to lead him to safety in the far West.

His plucky heart never once faltered, and when he had gone about two miles up the track he stepped aside to allow a train to pass.

The iron monster thundered on and swept away into the darkness. With a sigh as he watched it disappear, Frank took a step forward, but came to a sudden standstill.

A man was standing directly in his path, his arms folded across his breast, and his dark eyes glaring upon the wanderer.

CHAPTER VI.

PHILIP DEVERELL'S nervous system was so completely shattered by the awful ordeal through which he had passed on the night of the fire, and not being made of the same stuff as Frank Sparkle, that he did not leave his

room until the afternoon following our hero's flight from the city, despite the urgency of the case.

However, having like "Richard," "become himself again," he donned his clothes and sallied forth, taking the direction of the Five Points, in which place, the reader will be pleased to remember, resided that murderous wretch of the euphonious title—Giovanni St. Gash.

As previously, Deverell passed up the rickety staircase and pushed open the door of the Italian's room without a courtesy of asking admittance, and found Giovanni, as usual, displaying the laziness of his race, by snoring on his bed.

The new-comer strode to him and shook him roughly.

"Get up!"

The Italian opened his eyes and a smile of satisfaction painted his dark face.

"Good-de-day, Mr. Deverell. Ia thoughta your burn' up, but Ia didn't get ze chance to see youa, and youa forbida me to come toa your house."

"Quite right," replied the visitor, sinking into a seat with an oath that made even Giovanni's blood curdle.

"Whata ze mattair?" he asked, springing up.

"St. Gash, we have been fools!"

"Whata wea done?"

"Nothing; only killed the wrong man—that's all," Deverell replied with a sardonic laugh, "and he the very one I would have had live. By my power over him, I held a power over the boy; but now he is gone, there is no help for it—we must dispose of the whelp ourselves."

"No one is to blame; it was all a mistake. The bouquet fell at the feet of the wrong person, and you killed him. Of course you were not supposed to know the difference, and I did not calculate upon changing positions—at least, just then."

"One would naturally suppose that his guardian and protector being dead, the boy was wholly at our mercy; but there one would be wrong, for I did not wish the stain of blood upon my hands, and, although he defied me, I am confident I could eventually have brought Sparkle to terms and made him kill the boy; but as matters now stand and I before remarked, it devolves upon ourselves."

All this while St. Gash had been an earnest listener, for this was the first intimation he had received of the terrible mistake.

After Deverell concluded, there was a lengthy pause of silence; then the Italian spoke:

"Dis boy; wherea he is?"

"Of course, at the house in Bleeker street."

"Well, whata wea do?"

For reply, Deverell looked him straight in the eyes, and said:

"St. Gash, if a serpent lay in a certain hole only waiting the passage of time to sting you, what would you do?"

"Do," said the Italian, his eyes glittering fiercely, "do? I'd digga him up and cr-r-rush him under my heel!"

"That's exactly what I mean to do. We must first unearth this reptile and then slay him, before he becomes aware of my reason for hunting him down, since Sparkle may have left that which will eventually acquaint him, and in such an event, my cake is dough. Come, we have not a moment to lose, for even now the whelp may be slipping through my fingers, curse him!"

Giovanni St. Gash donned his hat, and followed his employer into the street.

They passed on through the crowded thoroughfare, and emerged, in an hour's time, upon Bleeker street, nearly opposite the home of honest and talkative Mrs. Brophy.

Quitting the Italian's side, and bidding him to remain where he was, Philip Deverell sauntered forward and rang the bell.

Mrs. Brophy answered the summons in person.

"Who would you be pleased to see, sir?" she asked.

Deverell lifted his hat politely.

"Is Mr. Frank Sparkle at home?"

"Lor', no, sir. I wish he was. He just ran off in the night like he was a thief, and poked a letter under my door."

"Could you let me see that letter?" asked Deverell, growing very pale and slipping a dollar into Mrs. Brophy's hand.

For reply, she pulled it from her pocket and passed it to him.

There were few words upon the sheet, but

those few were sufficient to blanch Philip Deverell's face still whiter, and to raise a tumult of varying emotions in his bosom.

The letter read:

"DEAR MRS. BROPHY: I cannot tell you how sorry I am to leave you, but pursued by a deadly danger, of which my father warned me, I have left the city until I am able to return a man.

"Then I shall return, and woe be unto those who have persecuted me and mine so long!

"I shall tramp (having no money) towards the west, following the railroad for guidance, until I can find employment in some theater.

"Good-by; God bless you for your kindness.

"FRANK SPARKLE."

As he finished the letter, Deverell crushed it in his hand, tossed it to the floor, and without a word, turned abruptly on his heel and strode away, leaving Mrs. Brophy gazing after him, and not quite sure he was not bereft of reason.

As for Deverell himself, doubt and hatred tore his bosom, and they were equally matched antagonists.

He reached the Italian and drew him aside.

"Well?"

"There is no help for it—we must follow the boy."

"Is he gone?"

"Yes, to the west, tramping along the rails. Curse him! there was that in his letter—d—n it, does he know?"

The Italian did not offer a reply, but stood mutely by, watching him and awaiting his command.

Deverell foamed with rage.

"I'll find him—I'll crush him, if I put my own neck in the noose! Come, St. Gash; come!"

"Are youa goin' toa follow de boy?"

"Yes; step by step to the end of the world—come!"

"St. Gash grasped his arm and said:

"If he isa walking de track, we cannot ride. We musta walka it too."

"You are right, there is no time to lose; an hour's delay may be fatal."

Deverell had plenty of money on his person, and being the heir of a vast estate, could easily draw upon his banker from any town for such sums as he might wish.

Therefore he stayed but long enough to purchase firearms and ammunition, and having found the boy's trail, started at once upon it.

Tramping the track was new work for the millionaire, but his safety demanded it, and when his strength failed him, avarice and revenge nerved him on for the struggle.

They traced the boy easily, for Frank had been seen by several inn-keepers along the road, but all this naturally delayed them, and two days expired without their coming up with the wanderer.

They put up at a second-rate hotel, and on the next morning, well victualled, returned to the hunt.

As the afternoon grew, Deverell spied a lonely farm-house, and, stepping up, accosted a girl who was seated near the gate.

"I beg pardon, miss; but did you see a young, well-dressed fellow passing along here at any time?"

"Oh, yes, sir; if it is the one you mean. He carried a stick, to the end of which was attached a bundle. He was very handsome, and not more than nineteen. He stopped here to get a drink, and was joined, up at the bridge yonder, by another."

Deverell's brow grew dark—who was this other?

"Thank you. He's a runaway from school. Did you notice which way he went?"

The girl arose and pointed far up the curve.

"Yes; I watched him until he got out of sight; he went that way."

"Thanks. How far is the next house?"

"Some six miles, sir; and none beyond that for at least eight more."

Deverell joined St. Gash.

"Good," he said; "we are on the whelp's trail. At the farthest he is not more than fifteen miles ahead of us."

Accordingly, they walked briskly on, and as Frank, never dreaming of pursuit, sauntered slowly along, they gained upon him at every foot.

They passed the first house. The boy had been there also, and with light hearts they journeyed onward.

Night came on.

"Good!" muttered Deverell, as he surveyed the gloomy surroundings. "If the boy should fall into a stream with a stone around his

neck, no one will be any the wiser, and I shall be safe."

It was late when they passed the second house, for they knew the boy must rest, and while so doing they might overtake him.

Half a mile past the last farm-house, the Italian stopped suddenly and clutched his companion's arm.

"Looka there!"

He pointed as he spoke to the wooded slope, and through the trees a light could be seen burning.

"He has halted there. It will not do to shoot—the report would give the alarm; we must steal upon him, and if he has a companion, put both out of the way."

Accordingly they slipped into the trees, each with a keen dirk clutched in his hand, and stole cautiously towards the fire, where Frank Sparkle had halted to cook a few potatoes he had obtained upon the road.

As yet the plotters could not see the faintest sign of a human form—was the boy sleeping? Deverell fancied so, and his lips moved with a triumphant smile.

Ten yards more and the worst will be known.

Slipping into a deep patch, along which the bushes grew thickly enough to conceal them from the fire, Deverell paused and whispered to St. Gash:

"Strike well, and leave no blood stains upon the ground, as you value your dirty life!"

"Trusta me! Ia nevair mees ze mark!"

They took another step forward, two figures sprang from the thicket, two sticks knocked the knives from their hands and hurled them over in the dust, as Frank Sparkle exclaimed:

"Good evening, gentlemen!"

With a smothered oath, both men leaped to their feet, and were confronted by a pistol barrel.

"Move one step, Philip Deverell, and I'll feed the crows upon your body. You persecuted my father, you are hunting me to the death, but just now, I have a full hand!"

As the words rang forth from the lips of the Actor's Son, the arch plotter heard another voice again:

"Bust my biler, but ain't dis a rum go? 'Lay on Macbeth,' an' strike me lively ef I don't lay you out! Wictory! shout, Sparkle, 'ere's a tablux fur de curting to cum down on. Willany triumphanted over by wirtue. Hoor-ay!"

CHAPTER VII.

It will require no great exertion upon the reader's part to recall the night of Frank Sparkle's flight from the great metropolis, and he or she will readily remember that as the train swept away in the darkness, and the actor's son stepped on the ties, and began walking slowly up them, he came to a sudden halt as he glanced quickly up and saw a man, with arms folded across his breast, glaring at him.

It was scarcely light enough to distinguish the features of the person who put in such a strange and sudden appearance, but his attitude was of such a blood-curdling nature, that we may forgive Frank if he involuntarily drew back with a shudder.

The stranger never moved his arms, never took his eyes from the boy's face, but advanced slowly, nearer and nearer.

Frank was not a coward, but he somehow fancied this new-comer was an escaped lunatic, and show me the man, be he ever so brave, who would not quail at such a meeting, and in such a place.

Sparkle had backed several feet, his eyes still fixed upon those of the supposed madman, when, striking suddenly against one of the rails, he went sprawling over backward.

The bundle slipped from the stick, the slim knots burst asunder, and as the young actor leaped to his feet, he saw his theatrical treasures lay scattered upon the earth in full view of the stranger and himself.

His eyes wandered to the face of the new-comer; his, in turn, wandered to the bursted bundle, and then "a change came o'er the spirit of his dreams."

His face lit with surprise; a roomy aperture between his nose and his chin exposed itself freely; his arms slipped apart and fell until his hands rested upon his hips; his knees bent, his head plunged forward; upon the moment that all these contortions took place, a hoarse sound came forth from that very aperture; and this sound, Frank Sparkle made out as:

"H'Oh! strike me lively. Bust my bloomin' h'eyeballs h'if h'it aint a brother purfesh!"

The change was so great, the man's appearance so ludicrous, that Frank burst into a loud laugh.

"Are you an actor?" he asked, when he could recover his breath.

"H'am I! h'ain't I! I'm a commedyun. What're you?"

"I'm a juvenile; but I didn't think you were a fakir also."

"Yer didn't? vell, so 'elp me proper! Vot did yer take me fur?"

"Well, to tell the plain truth," replied our hero, "I thought you an escaped lunatic."

The misjudged *artiste* flung up his hands.

"H'Oh, carry me 'ome!" he cried. "Me a loonytick—me? h'Oh, strike me lively? Vy, I'm a purfeshnal actor from the 'Queen's Temple o' H'art an' H'artists.'"

"Were you in the Bowery on the night of the fire?"

"Yes; vos you?"

"Rather; I played Romeo. My name's Frank Sparkle."

"Vell, strike me lively! My name's Nic'las Dopp. You played A1, but 'im as did th' comedy, 'e vastn't h'a patch on me!"

Frank felt his eyes grow dim.

"Don't speak ill of him," he said, huskily.

"He was my father, and he perished in the fire."

Nicholas Dopp scratched his head.

"I axes yer parding, Sparkle. Blest if I hain't allus a-puttin' my foot in it. Come now, gather up yer perqu'visits—yer vardrobe, I mean, and step along. My vardrobe's 'id h'in a 'ole jist up the road, an' if yer've no ubjeckshuns we'll pal together as far as yer goin'. But see 'ere—vot does yer vant ter leave th' city fur? Carn't yer get no 'ngagements?"

"Oh, yes, plenty," replied Frank, "but like you, I'm on the tramp westward to seek a snap."

Then, as briefly as possible, he related all that had happened since leaving school, at which Nicholas Dopp marveled much, and expressed himself at its close:

"S'elp me proper, wouldn't I like to 'ave a bust h'at that Philp Deverell's claret case? H'oh, no!"

By this time, having walked on up the track some yards, they came to a curve, and switching off from the track, Dopp led the way to a sort of ravine, through which a slender, thread-like stream of water was gurgling.

"Welcome to the 'alls of Capulet," he said, flourishing his hand above his head. "You see, Sparkle, I vas jest goin' h'out to 'ook a few pertatoes ven I met yer, an' I thought as 'ow yer vas a beadle—beak, I mean—no, I don't! 'Ang it, perlicemen's the word. Now jest sit down, make yerself comfort'ble, an' I'll slide h'out arter those 'ere pertatoes, an' we'll 'ave a good supper afore we goes to sleep. There's my vardrobe an' my pistols h'if you wants to look h'over e'm while I'm gone. Be careful, though; them's loaded—the pistols, I mean. By—by my bloomer, fur a seekont."

And with these words the gamin was gone, leaving Frank with the articles he had honored by the name of "wardrobe," among which the really good pistols were the only articles of any value, although such words would have been more than sufficient to incur the life-long enmity of Mr. Nicholas Dopp, comedian, of the "Queen's Temple o' H'art and H'artists."

Left alone, Frank flung himself down upon the earth, his locked fingers clasped behind his head, his knees pointing upward, and his eyes riveted upon the starry skies.

In ten minutes Nicholas Dopp returned with his arms laden with potatoes he had dug from a neighboring field.

They gathered some brushwood, lit a fire, and cooked the vegetables in the flames.

Of this meal they partook heartily, and then laid them down to sleep.

Early next morning they were astir; the breakfast presented no change from their supper, and with the remainder of the raw potatoes in their pockets, they trudged along up the tracks as happy as a pair of kings.

It is needless to go further into detail concerning this tramp. Suffice it to say, that while they were cooking their potatoes on the night when Philip Deverell and the blood-thirsty St. Gash came upon them, Frank happened to cast his eyes out over the tracks, and there saw the twain approaching.

He gave a violent start, and paced forward. "Vot's h'up?" cried Dopp, glancing quickly at him.

"Hush! speak lower. I must get away from here; Philip Deverell is coming up the road in company with another man. Ah! they have seen the fire, and are creeping forward with knives in their hands. I can doubt no longer—he seeks me, and has found my trail. For God's sake, Nick, give me one of your pistols, and we will creep forward and surprise them—further, if possible, disarm them and escape."

"Blarst me bloomin' h'eyes!" cried Dopp, passing him the pistol, "h'Oh, von't ve pepper 'is wart!"

And bent upon this "wart peppering" expedition, the two young actors crept forward to repulse their enemies, and with what success we have already seen.

Philip Deverell had not counted upon such odds, and as he stood there with the barrel of a pistol glaring him straight in the eyes, his thoughts and words were far from being the best and holiest in the calendar.

As for St. Gash, for once he did not dare to hurl his stiletto, as the gamin capered before him, pistol in hand, and shouted:

"Bust my bread-basket! h'ain't yer a bloomin' pair o' beauties?"

CHAPTER VIII.

WE must now ask the reader to pace over a lapse of one week, and follow us to the picturesque little town of Piqua, in Ohio.

The night is a damp and drizzling one; the heavy mists that hang over the earth render the air raw as a later March night, and but few people have turned out to witness the performance of a traveling company who have come in for three nights during the fair-time, to present the "blood and thunder" drama to a people who will follow it with wide-open eyes and mouths, and go home to their beds as much in the dark concerning the plot as though they had never left their homes.

More's the pity; this style of play lives and is popular to-day.

"Ten o'clock!" chimes forth the cracked bell in the church steeple, and hardly has the last echo died out upon the stillness, ere a woman comes in view, passing down the one street and on up the road where it breaks off in a dark, deep fringe of poplars that toss in the wind to-night like gaunt, shadowy fingers that point upward toward a starless heaven.

An ample cloak of the brightest scarlet falls in graceful folds from her shoulders, and one end, flung over her head, formed its only covering.

Long wisps of white hair straggled down from this, fluttering in her sallow face, twisted around her scrawny throat, or patting her hollow cheeks. Her chin and nose are prominent through the loss of teeth, but her jet black eyes twinkle and flash wickedly, and as bright as those of twenty.

Who was she? the reader will ask.

For years the country people had been doing the same thing, but beyond the fact that she lived in a tumbledown shanty far back in the poplar woods on the banks of a sluggish sheet of water known as Elkton Pool, that her name was Hagar, and she was partially demented, they knew nothing, and did not care much.

Not a soul stopped the woman as she passed on up the street, but coming suddenly upon a lamp whose light streamed over a colored poster, she halted and scanned it eagerly.

Her face changed; the color faded out from it until those black eyes glared fiendishly.

It was the first intimation Hagar had received that a theatrical company was in town. She had passed the day at the fair, telling fortunes and such to the people who believed her, and taking the money thus earned from a capacious pocket, she clutched it in her palm and strode forward towards the little theater.

"Give me a programme," she said, striding up to the man at the door.

That worthy complied with her wish, and snatching it from him, she ran her eyes hungrily over the cast of characters.

Her face grew even whiter; her eyes twinkled more savagely; her thin lips closed tightly, and crushing the paper into a ball, she hurled it to the ground, and strode away in the darkness, muttering to herself:

"Not there—not there!"

Then her head bowed upon her breast, the white hair fluttered unheeded into her face,

and she moved slowly away up the muddy road.

In a short time she reached the poplar woods.

A few feet on, a barred gate guarded a straggling road beyond, but with an agility that her appearance belied, Hagar placed her hands upon this and vaulted over it.

Never so much as a word did she utter as she passed on up this dismal avenue and emerged at length in a sort of valley where lay the dank pool, and upon the other bank stood the rickety hut she was wont to call home.

Moss and creepers almost covered it, but through a little window a gleam of light stole out upon the darkness, and from a tall, brick chimney a faint trail of bluish smoke issued and drifted off through the trees.

A rough ladder in one corner, led, by means of a trap, to an apartment above, and as she drew a chair up before the fire, Hagar cast a furtive glance towards it.

"Humph! asleep."

That was all she said, and falling back in the chair, she covered her face with her hands while a tear trickled from beneath her locked fingers and fell upon the back of a cat that had leaped into her lap.

Half an hour passed; the weird woman did not move, until suddenly, without the least provocation she sprang to her feet, went through a strange pantomime expressive of a murder, and ended by falling flat upon the hearth.

Her acting was graceful, her facial expression most wonderful, and had any of the simple townfolk seen her then, they might have fancied at some time Hagar, the Prophetess, had been an actress.

As suddenly as she had begun her acting, she leaped to her feet, drew herself toward the chimney, and looking cautiously around, pulled out a brick, took forth a printed slip of paper and held it where the firelight could stream upon it, while she read.

"Nearly eighteen years," she muttered, that devil light coming again into her eye; "every hour has been a century of pain, but the end—ha—ha—ha! the end—the end!"

CHAPTER IX.

RETRACE we our steps to Frank Sparkle and Nicholas Dopp, whom we left holding Deverell and the Italian at bay in the little glen.

Once the desperate man essayed to spring forward upon his gallant young antagonist, but Frank's finger pressed the trigger, and Deverell saw that he only courted death.

"Nick."

"Ay?"

"Cover that ruffian and back towards me."

"All right, me covey."

The gamin backed towards him, and when he was near enough, Frank put forth his hand, took the pistol from him and covered St. Gash. He now held both at bay.

"Drop your knives!" he commanded.

Both weapons fell to the earth with a metallic clank.

"Pick them up, Nick."

Dopp did as desired, and when the knives were in his possession, Frank said to the two men:

"Hold up your hands!"

Up in the air went two pairs of hands.

"Now, Nick, search them—take away what other weapons they may have, but if either one moves a muscle, I'll riddle him."

"Blowed h'if this 'ere h'ain't prime!" said Dopp, as he went through the men's pockets and extracted the revolvers Deverell had bought when he left New York.

With four loaded pistols directed at them and themselves unarmed, you may imagine the men did not feel any too comfortable.

Frank Sparkle's face was radiant with triumph. With his eyes fixed on Deverell, he said:

"Gentlemen, you have followed me a long way, but you haven't caught me yet. You will, doubtless, follow me still further, but, with the help of Heaven, I will again elude you. You seek my life, but I will give you yours. Now fly at full speed straight down the tracks towards the east, and the first who turns will sup on cold lead. Go!"

The men needed no second bidding, but tore like mad towards the east, while our heroes snatched up their traps and fled westward; never halting until some miles were between them.

"Orray fur Sparkle an' Dopp!" shouted the young comedian as they came to a halt.

"Ve vax 'em that time, Frank!"

The young actor merely smiled and laid down to sleep.

They were certain the men would not again attack them until they had refurnished themselves with weapons, and so slept soundly.

Early the next morning they were astir, and after cooking a few potatoes and shooting a couple of robins, they feasted well and went on their way.

There was a smack of romance about this gypsying life that just suited Frank.

Once or twice as they passed through towns, they saw the bills of theatrical companies, ascertained the way they were going and pressed on after in hopes of overtaking them.

Thus a month elapsed, and one bright night they entered Piqua with the welcome knowledge that a show was in progress.

Music clashed and crashed upon the air as they passed up the street, and reaching the little play-house, Frank pointed to the bills and said:

"Look, here they are; we must see the manager."

But Dopp grasped his arm and cried, as he pointed the opposite way:

"Strike me lively, look there! Blest if there hain't hopposishun."

And sure enough a portable theater was erected opposite, and the next moment another sheet-iron band began playing "See the Conquering Hero," in various keys.

This, mingled with "Annie Laurie" from the other side, and the shouting of both agents in this extreme dilemma, was by no means pleasant, and the crowds that thronged the street cheered both sides lustily.

"Here you are, the finest show on earth. 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'The Bleedin' Buccaneer' and 'Macbeth' to-night," from the agent of the portable, and:

"Walk right in, 'Cast-Iron Dick,' 'The Slab-Sided Ruffian,' and a first-class farce!" from the agent of the opera-house company.

Dopp's face lit up.

"Blow me if this hain't like 'ome!" he said, clutching at Frank's sleeve. "Go hit, little un, shout, Slab Sides, 'ooray!'"

By mistake both parties had hit the same town, and both were desirous of carrying off the honors!

"Finest show on earth!"

"No connection with other impostors."

"Walk right in!"

"Step up, now!"

"There'll be a row," said Frank; "which manager will we see first?"

"Suit yourself—I'm content."

Again the music burst forth, the shouting agents bawled at the top of their lungs, and the crowd cheered lustily.

"'Ooray! guv it ter 'em! Lay hon, Macbeth! 'ooray! Look there, Frank."

No reply.

Nicholas Dopp turned sharply—the spot where the Actor's son had been standing was vacant—Frank had suddenly disappeared.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Nicholas Dopp turned so suddenly around, and found our hero gone, his first surmise was that Philip Deverell had put in a sudden appearance, and spirited the young actor away.

With his hand laid upon the butt of his revolver, and a decided low-comedy air, the eminent London comedian darted through the crowd in quest of Deverell.

He carefully scanned the features of each one that he met, but no trace of Philip or St. Gash could he find.

His fears now took a more formidable shape, and raising his voice he shouted.

"Hi, Sparkle—Frank, where h'are yer?"

A hand was laid heavily upon his shoulder, and, turning, he saw our hero standing beside him.

They picked their way to the side door of the little theater, the only one the town could boast of save when, as now, a portable one came along.

Frank had secured a bill, and found the manager's name to be Mogul Neversink, so he boldly knocked upon the door and asked to see him.

A frowsy-headed woman in a spangled black velvet train that had seen its best days some fifty years previous, but, nevertheless, draped the form of the bewitching leading lady of to-day (*vide bills*) pointed him out—a

slender, herring-shaped man in a glossy suit of black, pacing up and down the stage, tearing his hair, and giving utterance to language not heard in polite society.

Frank doffed his hat and stepped forward.

The seedy manager stopped suddenly, eyed him from head to foot, and after a prelude of most expressive adjectives, demanded:

"Who're you? how did you get here? where did you come from, and what do you want?"

"I'm an actor, sir, and from New York. I want an engagement for leading juveniles."

"Oh, you do, eh? What's that beside you? One of your props, or part of your wardrobe?"

Nick's breast swelled proudly.

"No, sir," he said, "I h'am Nich'las Dopp, the eminent Lunnon commedyun, from the Queen's Temple o' H'art an H'artists."

"You are, eh?" demanded Manager Mogul Neversink. "Well, we don't want you."

"But, sir—" began Frank.

Mogul Neversink waved his hand toward the door.

"I don't want you!" he bawled. "Git!"

"But I am Frank Sparkle from the Bowery Theater."

"Bowery Theater be blowed. Git, I say!"

Humbled and abashed, our two friends strode towards the door.

On the threshold, Dick Dopp turned and waved his hand.

"Veleaves yer," he said, "but ter yer dyin' h'our yer will be 'aunted by h'our ghosts, yer snaggle-toothed, pestiferous, last year's bean stalk, yer—"

His remarks were cut suddenly short by Manager Neversink snatching up a pound paint brush and hurling it at him.

It struck him squarely in the stomach, and the eminent London comedian made an acrobatic exit through the door.

"Blow the h'old fox!" he gasped, when he struggled to his feet. "I'll git h'even with 'im!"

"Never mind, Nick," laughed Frank, as they turned away, "you got his brush, anyhow."

Sadly they wended their way toward a farm-house, and creeping into the barn, found a bed in the sweet fragrant hay.

In the morning they sought out the manager of the portable theater, Hugh Trugold, and stepping up, Frank raised his hat.

"Mr. Trugold, I believe? My name is Frank Sparkle. I am in quest of an engagement."

"Have you ever played before?"

"Oh, yes, I was the leading juvenile of the Bowery Theater at the time of its destruction."

"Have you bills to prove that?"

For reply Frank pulled them from his pocket and passed them to him.

Evidently something pleased the manager, for he shook our hero's hand and said:

"Come in; I must speak with you."

After introducing Nick, Frank complied, and was led into the theater, a pretty affair, clean and neat as the proverbial new pin.

"Mr. Sparkle," said Trugold, motioning the boys to a seat, "you have come most opportunely. I see by these bills you are up in 'Romeo.' Could you play the part to-night?"

"Most assuredly, sir."

"Do so, and I will give you ten dollars each per week and pay all expenses. Is this satisfactory?"

The sum was not great, but both boys were overjoyed.

Trugold excused himself for a few moments, called in a man who had been tacking up paintings and talked earnestly with him.

The man gathered up some paint and brushes and passed upon the stage.

Manager Trugold returned to our heroes.

"Mr. Dopp, what farces are you up in?"

"H'oh, I'm h'up h'in most h'all on 'em."

He then proceeded with a list, and at length struck upon one with which Trugold's company were familiar, and this was announced for the night.

"Now," said the manager, after they had been talking for a couple of hours, "we will repair to the hotel, where you must be introduced to the company."

In the best of spirits the boys passed out of the theater and were surprised to see a vast crowd gathered around the entrance.

Approaching nearer, they saw that a freshly painted canvas was the center of attraction, and on this was lettered in brilliant colors:

"To-night—to-night! The event of the nineteenth century! Engagement of the famous and talented actor, Mr. Frank Sparkle, whose escape from the fire at the New York Bowery Theater has excited the whole world, and produced a furor only second to his wonderful acting. Also, first appearance of the famous comedian, Mr. Nicholas Dopp, of the Queen's Temple of Art, London, England. A glorious bill—three great plays!"

And beside this glowing announcement were the bills of the Bowery Theater in neat frames, clearly proving the identity of our hero.

This was the straw at which Trugold had clutched, and it was likely to prove a solid one.

The two boys were led to the little house that flattered itself by the title of hotel, a wagon was secured, this in turn was plastered over with panegyric announcements, and led by the band, they paraded the fairs and streets to the delight and astonishment of all.

The little theater was packed to suffocation, and on the steps of the opera house Manager Mogul Neversink cursed his folly in letting the boys slip through his fingers, and finally closed his doors in utter despair and left, for not a soul entered his show.

The performance opened with the farce, and comical Nick Dopp carried the house by storm.

Then followed a dark, mysterious and gloomy outrage, called the "Bleeding Buccaneer," and then—"Romeo and Juliet."

The heroine was a lovely miss, who, at the least, acted intelligibly, and more than pleased the audience, who went into hysterical delight at the clever acting, handsome face and well-padded form of Frank.

Our hero's dresses were new and bright, and if the audience did not appreciate his acting as well as they should, the glittering tinsels and glossy satins elicited volleys of admiring "Oh's!" and the pretty country girls voted him "just too lovely to live."

His triumph was complete.

The play proceeded; and at the end of the fourth act the handsome young Romeo was called before the curtain to answer to a volley of cheers.

At that instant a bouquet tore through the air and fell directly at his feet.

The young actor drew back as though stung by an adder, and gasped:

"White roses! The signal of danger!"

Then his wild eyes roved over the house in quest of Philip Deverell, but he was nowhere in sight.

"He threw it; I know it," muttered Frank, as he picked up the bouquet and bowed off.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the night of Frank Sparkle's appearance at the portable theater old Hagar stood in the shadow of the ruined hut, her eyes fastened on the ripple-stirred bosom of the dark pool, the wind playing idly through her white tresses, and her bony fingers opening and closing with a convulsive movement.

"Ha—ha—ha!" she chuckled, feebly, "a show in town—two shows in town! Oh, I'll go to-morrow!"

Then a cloud obscured the face of the moon, a shadow distorted the features of the prophetess, and she fairly hissed:

"Is he there? Is he? Blood—blood to drown him in it! He lives yet; I know it; we shall meet again, and 'like the hungry tigris, battling for its young, I'll tear my victim limb from limb!' Ho—ho—ho! One blow, ay, two, three, but I'll have a thousand for each one, and a million for this!"

As she spoke, the weird woman rent the crimson folds of the drapery from her head, and revealed a dark, purple scar across the upper part of her forehead.

Then turning upon her heel she strode into the hut and cast a dry log upon the fire.

It soon burst into flames, and with the weird light shivering over the scene, the half-demented creature locked the door, or rather barred it, hung a heavy cloth over the window, and darting to the ladder, began climbing rapidly up it towards the loft above.

The light was but faint here, yet strong enough to disclose a long, narrow box, securely locked.

With folded arms, the prophetess surveyed this for an instant and chuckled:

"Ha—ha—ha! asleep!"

Merely these words, then she fumbled in her pocket, produced a key, and falling upon

her knees, inserted it in the lock and turned it briskly.

A sharp, clicking sound—the lid flew up and disclosed—a human skeleton!

Summoning her cat, which leaped upon the ladder as though well aware for what it was called, she took it into her arms and cast it into the box.

"Gnaw 'em, Sancho, chew the bones; crumble 'em to powder, that he may see my work. He slew her, not me. She was going to die but I would not spare the blow. Vengeance is on the trail, murder is in the wind, and blood—blood everywhere. Gnaw, chew, grind, Sancho, good cat, brave boy, ha—ha—ha! we'll find him yet, an' then, woe—woe—woe! Ha—ha—ha!"

Sancho gnawed at the dead bones, the horrible sound filling the air and the flicker from the burning log in the room below lighting up the unhallowed place.

Hour after hour the half-crazed woman sat there and watched the feline's ghastly feast.

The darkness of night died out, and when the dull, gray streaks of coming dawn streamed athwart the eastern sky, she arose, called off the cat, locked the box and shambled to her wretched couch.

The afternoon waned, the night drew on, and in the shadow of her rude hut the mad woman stood awaiting the hour when she should away on her mission of vengeance.

The shadows deepened.

Still she stood there, jingling some coins in her skinny palm, her eyes fixed on the noisome bosom of the fetid pool, and her ears drinking in the distant sounds of the band, that told her the hour for the performance had drawn on.

"Now I will go," she chuckled.

She took a mock-jewel-hilted dagger, evidently a stage prop, from a chest, sharpened it upon a stone, and concealing it beneath her drapery, barred the door and stalked toward the town.

She reached the long street and passed slowly down it, her eyes bent upon the ground, until the lights of the portable theater informed her of her journey's end; then, with that hideous leer on her face, she glided forward.

Her eyes fell upon the canvas placard. She started, grew pale, and drew nearer.

"To-night—to-night!" she read, half aloud; then those great, hungry orbs flashed lower, fell upon the name of the Actor's Son, and she drew back with a gurgle of delight.

"Sparkle—ay, that's the name—the furies are just—revenge—revenge!"

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Frank Sparkle tottered off the stage with the white bouquet in his nerveless fingers, the members of the company crowded around him, and were lavish in their praise of his acting.

Even the "juvenile" who had before played Romeo, and naturally felt somewhat piqued at the change, forgot his anger, and like a true son of Thespis, grasped the boy's hand and said:

"Sparkle, you're immense; hang me if the change isn't the best card Trugold has shown this season."

The young actor looked the thankfulness his heart forbade him utter, then as he caught those welcome words he shook the "juvenile's" hand heartily and then turned toward the dressing-room.

Then the frightened, pallid stoniness came back into his face, and tossing the bouquet to Juliet with a poor attempt at a smile, he bade her take it and glided into the room to change.

Here were assembled other members of the company, for, in "taking the road" with an organization of this kind the gentlemen are often obliged to dress together, and on every side the young actor was met with words of deep-felt praise:

Nick Dopp was there, dressed for the street, and as Frank entered he arose and came towards him with outstretched hands.

Then as he drew him aside he whispered:

"What makes yer so pale? Yer tight strap 'ais't busted, 'as h'it?"

"No," he said, "either not quite so bad as that or much worse—Philip Deverell is in front."

"Blast me wes'cut! Yer don't mean h'it?"

Frank then proceeded to tell him the story of the roses, and his reasons for believing his enemy near. The comical, frightened look that had first come over the comedian's face

broke away, and as our hero concluded he burst into a hearty guffaw.

"Ho, ho, ho! Dash my buttons! knock me inter a red flannin' peddicut, hain't yer jolly green. Vy, hit's some gal has 'as gone hoff'er nut arter yer, hand throwed yer them 'ere blossoms ter show 'er happreciation hof yer booty hand helegance. 'Tain't no more Philip Dev'rell than hit's me as chucked 'em."

Somewhat reassured, Frank made his change of costume, and the tragedy proceeded, although our hero's eyes would often wander over the house in search of Deverell or the villainous St. Gash, but he saw neither.

* * * * *

The play was over; Juliet had joined her poisoned lover; the lights were put out, and the performers making all haste to repair to the hotel.

Quietly packing up his wardrobe, Frank gave it to Nick, and with the leading lady on his arm, followed by Dopp and the soubrette, accompanied the party home to the hotel.

In the hallway our hero called the eminent London comedian aside, and said:

"See here, Nick, I feel blue and downcast; those flowers have affected me—although I don't believe Deverell was there, after all. I'm going to take a stroll down the road a bit; you needn't wait up for me. Good-night."

"Ave yer got a pistol?"

"No: there will be no need for one," with a light laugh; "I shan't be attacked."

"Well, then, good-night. All I ask hof yer his ter keep yer blinkers peeled."

Our hero nodded his head, and passed out into the mellow moonlit roadway.

Reaching a cutting where a slanting pathway hedged in by rows of briars, swerved from the roadway proper towards a patch of woodland below, the young actor charmed by the natural beauty of the spot beneath the telling effects of a swelling moon, strolled leisurely into it, and slowly began the descent.

The briar path led on for half a mile, then it wound off through the pine patch, and as our hero entered this, he more than half fancied he heard a soft, stealthy footfall crush the leaves and twigs behind him.

He turned quickly, but the moonlight alone was in the road.

He took a half dozen steps forward; the fancied crash became reality, as two men leaped from the shadow of the brushwood and seized him.

A single glance told him who they were—Giovanni St. Gash and Philip Deverell!

"Good God! trapped!" he gasped, as he reeled back, "trapped, and I am unarmed!"

Philip Deverell folded his arms and glared at him—a chilling sneer curling his lips.

"So, my beauty, you are in my power at last."

Philip Deverell," cried Frank, "why do you hunt me down? What am I to you?"

"A viper!" hissed the man, "a deadly, poisonous viper, and I mean to crush you. Away with him, St. Gash!"

The Italian pushed the boy back against a tree, bound him with a cord he took from his pocket, and then stepped back to view his work.

"Vera goot. Youa maka de fine corpse!"

Without deigning to speak to the boy, Philip Deverell turned, faced Giovanni and said:

"Let one stab pierce his heart—the body may be left in the road. We will not be suspected, for the law respects gentility. Throw!"

The murderous Italian plucked a stiletto from his breast, seized the needle-like point between the thumb and first finger of his right hand, and lifted it above his head to hurl it at the helpless victim.

"God help me!" moaned Frank, closing his eyes, in momentary expectation of death.

"Von, twoa, thr—"

"Hold!"

A brawny figure strode through the thicket, stood up before the boy, and faced his assailants with a glance of fire.

"Maledictions! Who are you?"

"Well, I might be Christopher Columbus, but I ain't," was the reply of the new-comer, as he freed the boy; "but for all that I love fair play, and I'm going to see it."

The knife had fallen from Giovanni's hand, and he leaped forward to regain it.

"Sacra!" he hissed. "Standa aside, or my knife drinka your heart's blood!"

"Strike!" shrieked Deverell, as the Italian spoke.

The glittering stiletto leaped into the air, but before it could be hurled forward on its deadly mission, St. Gash awoke to the reality that a pistol barrel was glaring him straight in the eyes.

"A pretty good point, Macaroni, but I go you several better. I know you, Philip Deverell, and I hate you only worse than the carion vulture."

"This has been a deep-laid plot, but just now I have the upper hand."

"Wolf-hearted monster, you seek this lad's life—come and take it at your peril. By the God that sees us, I'll brain the first man who dares to advance and stay the boy!"

"Now, cowards, show your pluck!"

CHAPTER XIII.

NOT one foot did either of those desperate men advance, as the new-comer hurled that defiant challenge at them, and bade him who dared come and take the boy from behind the pistol he clutched in his iron-like grasp.

"You are a pretty plucky fellow, Philip Deverell," the man chuckled, "but you have met your match this time."

"Who are you?" re-demanded Deverell.

"How do you know my name?"

The stranger laughed a cold, chilling laugh, whose every note gurgled like liquid poison in the ears of his listeners.

"How do I know your name? Ha-ha-ha! well I like that. How could any man mistake you when it is written so plainly on your forehead. You call yourself Deverell, but the fiends know you better, for they have spelled it there—Devil-Hell, and by the Eternal, they do know you well when they change the orthography like that."

Deverell's face grew livid with rage.

"A truce to this," he foamed. "By what right do you interfere?"

"Right! by the right of justice. You'd like to slay that boy, wouldn't you? Just as the macaroni-eating fiend beside you slew his protector, Sam Sparkle!"

Frank leaped forward.

"Did he kill my father?" he cried.

"No: but Mr. Devil-hell did. Sam Sparkle was not your father, the man who hunted him down knows who he was. Look at him, Philip Deverell and tell him I have lied—if you can! Tell him that Harvey Arlington still lies when he says you slew his father in cold blood, still lies when he says you are his uncle, the brother of the man you killed!"

While he was speaking the pistol had fallen at his side, and as he caught those fatal words and knew that his secret was out, Philip Deverell leaped forward.

The hand clutching the pistol leaped up, but before Harvey Arlington's finger could press the trigger, the weapon was dashed from his hand and his infuriated and blood-hungry assailant closed with him.

"You know too much!" he hissed, as they went crashing to the ground.

Over and over went the combatants; as Philip Deverell gained the upper hand, he cried:

"Quick, St. Gash, the boy!"

The Italian leaped forward, seized the stiletto and whirled it about his head.

Whizz! the deadly missile whirled through the air, and as Frank saw it coming, he dropped upon his face, while the keen, slender blade buried itself in the tree where he had been standing.

As he fell, our hero's hand touched the fallen pistol, and he gripped it eagerly.

With a wild, animal-like howl Giovanni St. Gash leaped towards him.

"Sacra! youa shall nota escapa!"

With a single bound, Frank leaped to his feet and leveled the pistol fairly at his head.

"Shan't I? well, now, old cockalorum, don't you be too sure of that!"

The Italian halted in his onward progress, glared down the smooth, glittering barrel of the pistol, and with a howl of rage, turned tail and fled at full speed up the moonlit road.

Frank discharged a shot after him, but the bullet flew wide of its mark.

He then turned his attention to Philip Deverell and Harvey Arlington, but the man recognized his peril, saw the turn affairs had taken, and shaking Harvey from his hold, bounded to his feet and fled after his companion in crime.

"Fire after him—kill him!" hissed Arling-

ton, springing to his feet, but Frank's hand dropped to his side and he shook his head sadly.

"No," he said. "You have declared him my uncle—he did not deny it; and be his faults what they may, blood should not revolt against blood. I cannot kill him even if he did slay my father."

Harvey Arlington hung his head.

"Oh, my God!" he moaned, "I should have remembered that. Why did I not kill him myself when he was in my power? Better, far better, that I should swing for that, than he should live to torment and to torture you! Give me the pistol, boy!"

"But you must promise me you will not kill him."

"I promise," said the man, and he took the weapon from our hero's hand, and Frank rejoined:

"Let him go; let the law be his punishment. He will run to the end of his rope and then it will hang him. Evil never triumphs long, Mr. Arlington. It is like a cat—it has nine lives, but let it hang long enough and it would die if it had twenty."

Harvey Arlington laughed softly and slid his arm into our hero's.

"You are quite a philosopher, Frank," he said, "but come now, let us get back to the hotel."

"Are you stopping there, sir?"

"Yes, I came on from New York this morning in search of you."

"Of me?"

"Precisely. No doubt you are surprised at the interest I take in you. Learn then that I knew and loved your father, and vowed to compass the death of his destroyer. I also knew the man who reared you and taught you to believe yourself his own—Sam Sparkle, the comedian."

The stranger's voice grew husky as he spoke, and Frank saw him brush away a tear, but for which man.

"Of course you knew of his death, Mr. Arlington?"

"Yes; he was stabbed by that Italian. I saw it done."

He then proceeded to tell the story of the murder, at which our hero marveled much, for he believed the old comedian had perished by the flames.

"God help me to bring his assassin to the scaffold," he moaned, "for I will do it, Mr. Arlington."

"Heaven bless you, boy, for your kindness. You have been kept in the dark too long; tomorrow I will tell you all, and you may then put in your claim to the vast wealth which is yours by right at your majority. I would tell you now, but my heart is heavy; you shall know all on the morrow."

"On the morrow; how blind are mortals, for with all their ingenuity they cannot foresee a trifle of the future; cannot probe the deep mysteries of those two small words—to be!"

Arm in arm the stranger and the boy passed up the moonlit road, turned into the main street, and bent their footsteps toward the hotel.

As they reached the portable theater—which stood on a space where years after Conover's Opera House was erected—a figure rushed forward from the darkness beyond, and the result was a collision between both parties.

"H'oh, me vind! Blarst h'it hall, carn't yer keep h'outen h'other people's vay?"

"Nick!" cried Frank, in surprise, as he recognized the speaker by his voice, "what the deuce brings you out at this time of night?"

The comedian scrambled up from the dust where he had fallen by force of the meeting, and rushed headlong at Sparkle.

"Vot, Frank! Blow me h'if I h'ain't glad ter see yer! I thought h'as 'ow yer was h'a stiff long h'afore this."

"But that is not answering my question. What bring you out here?"

"Blarst h'it all," replied Nick, "vot do yer arsk me that fur when I've h'answered yer? Don't I tell yer I thought yer was a stiff? I felt summat h'a 'ow yer vas h'in trouble, h'and I couldn't sleep yer know; so I jist got h'up, shuffled h'inter me togs h'and come h'out h'arter yer. But I didn't come h'unarmed—look!"

He opened his coat as he spoke and displayed a perfect arsenal beneath; then, with a sudden, serio-comic air, he seized our hero by the arm and whispered in his ear:

"I say, Frank, who's the h'old bloke h'alongside h'on yer there?"

Speedily as possible young Sparkle made him acquainted with the "old bloke" in question, and informed him of the inestimable service he had done him.

Nicholas Dopp seized Arlington's hand, and wrung it so heartily that Harvey looked to be certain that it was not loose at the wrists.

By this time they had reached the hotel, and all three passed up the narrow stairway.

On the upper landing Harvey Arlington seized Frank's hand, shook it fervently, and passed into his room.

"E's a prime sort of a chap, Sparkle," said Nick, as they reached our hero's door, "but I'm glad 'e's gone fur there's summat h'as I wants ter arsk yer, now that Philip Dev'rell's turned h'up."

"Well, fire away, old man, but make it in one act, for I'm deucedly sleepy."

"Frank," and the eminent London comedian's voice sank to a low whisper, "yer wants a pectorator."

"No! do I, though?"

"Ay, that you do. This Dev'rell's a desperate cove, h'and 'e'd sand yer nut h'as quick h'as 'e'd vink 'is bleedin' h'eyes, yer know. Now take my h'advice, let me sleep h'in the room vid yer ter night. Yer know you're h'on the h'outside h'of the 'ouse, h'and h'a pursing might h'easily get h'in. Jest let me turn h'in h'aw, h'and ven I sleeps I'll be vide awake h'all night long. Do now."

Frank laughed and shook his head.

"No, I thank you, Nick; I'm safe enough. Philip Deverell wouldn't dare seek me here; I'm too well surrounded to be fearful of that. Good night."

"Good night. Von't yer now?"

"No. Good night. Wake me in time for rehearsal."

The chamber door closed softly. The eminent comedian stood alone in the hallway.

"E von't be varned," he muttered. "But blarst my bloomin' h'eyes h'f I'll leave 'im h'anyway!"

And with this queerly expressed sentiment Nicholas Dopp laid down to sleep on the door-mat, with his left hand resting on the butt of one pistol, and his right clutching the muzzle of another.

* * * * *

"Ah!"

A low, muffled cry of pain. Nick started up into full wakefulness and sat up.

"Ah!" the cry came again.

"Good God! h'it's Frank!"

CHAPTER XIV.

We left the mad prophetess standing before the flaming sign bearing our hero's name, in front of the portable theater.

Deep, dark flashes of light burned and spluttered in her coal-black eyes as she read the boy's name, and hate, fierce, terrible, undying hate—swayed her gaunt form and distorted her white face.

"We meet—we meet?" she hissed. "Loved once, now doubly despised; I shall nerve my arm for the fatal stroke of vengeance, the bloody retaliation!"

Then, and for an instant only, the memory of an old love sprang up in her heart, softened the light in her eye and gave battle to the words of vengeance Satan whispered in her ear.

They were equally matched antagonists: sometimes one wavered, sometimes the other, but the conflict was short lived and the fiend was victorious.

Still clutching her dagger, she strode forward and passed into the theater.

As we have said, it was densely packed, and having arrived late, Hagar was unable to find a seat.

Slinking back in the shadow of a pillar, she turned those glittering eyes, sparkling with their bitter light, towards the stage and watched for him.

Many in the crowd glanced at her and wondered to see the weird woman, the seeress and the prophetess they were wont to call her, throwing off her mantle of silent mummery and mingling with the throng in the hall of Thespis.

Ah! how little they knew of mad Hagar's past.

The roar of the orchestra had died out, the curtain rolled upward with a soft rustle, the farce went on, the mysterious drama followed, and then came the tragedy.

The woman's heart beat quicker. Her eyes sparkled—her face paled, and the hand beneath her flaming mantle clutched convulsively at the hilt of the jeweled dagger.

A low, soft swell of music, then a flutter among the audience, and as she bent forward she heard a man whisper to his companion: "Here he comes!"

"Here he comes!" she repeated, huskily, as a tumult of applause shook the canvas sides of the theater, but the words were drowned and lost.

The applause grew louder; her eyelids drooped with excitement, and when next she raised them Frank Sparkle stood upon the stage.

He spoke; her ear drank in the sound, her face grew even whiter, and her form shook as with palsy. She reeled, drew back, and gasped:

"The furies are false; 'tis the wrong man!"

Looking forward to the meeting had taxed her sorely, but to find she was mistaken was the last straw that broke the camel's back; and with those words still warm upon her lips, she fell backward to the floor in a death-like swoon.

Strong arms raised her tenderly, and bore her from the theater, but her iron clutch upon the jewel-studded hilt of the stage dagger never relaxed.

When consciousness returned the cool air fanned her face, she saw the stars above her.

She arose to go, but a man stepped to her side and bent over her.

"Are you better, ma'am?"

She looked at him, passed her hand over her brow to collect her thoughts, and then replied mechanically:

"Yes. What's the matter? Who are you?"

"You fainted in the theater, for reply to your first question, and to your second, I am the manager."

She sprang up like a tigress.

"You—you the manager! Then you know him?"

"Him—who?" replied Trugold.

"The actor—Sparkle."

"Well, rather, considering I pay his salary."

She drew nearer and clutched his arm.

"Who is he? Where did he come from? Speak! Why do you stand there like a statue? Answer me. Who is he?"

Hugh Trugold looked at her as though she had taken leave of her senses.

"Don't you understand me?" shrieked Hagar, shaking him like a refractory poodle. "Are you dumb? Who is this Sparkle?"

"Why, he's Sparkle, of course. That's all I know."

"Whence comes he?"

"From New York. Himself and a man came—"

"A man?" questioned Hagar. "Is he not a man?"

Trugold shook his head.

"Not yet; he is scarcely more than eighteen."

The prophetess glared him in the eyes as if to read his thoughts and probe the truth of his replies, then with an inexpressive "Hump!" turned abruptly upon her heel, and strode away in the darkness, leaving the shaken manager to gaze after her in undisguised surprise.

"Phew!" he whistled, "if she hasn't a shingle loose on her upper story, then I'm off my nut!" And having thus given vent to his feelings, he turned back into the theater.

As for Hagar, she passed some feet up the road, hid the dagger, and clasped her head in her hands.

"I've heard 'em call me mad," she muttered. "I wonder if I am. It was his name, but it was not his face, form, nor voice; he should be old; he should be gray-white, like me. Still—still, this Sparkle's voice was like one I have heard often somewhere, in my dreams, perhaps. It is that of—of—of—Great God! am I mad, that I cannot remember?"

"Names, faces, voices of the past crowd upon me, but I cannot place one of them, yet all live in the mist of by-gone days."

"What if I should die after all without meeting him? No—no—no! I must not think of it—I won't. Home—home, to watch, to wait until he comes, ha—ha—ha! until he comes!"

She reeled on up the road a few yards, but just as she came to a dark curve, she caught

the sound of men conversing, and as she sank back in the shadow, she muttered:

"Voices—voices; I know one of them, but whose is it?"

Again her hands wandered over her wrinkled brow as if to collect her scattered thoughts—scattered by insanity—and at that instant, Philip Deverell and Giovanni St. Gash came down the road on their way to the theater.

They were talking earnestly, and Hagar drank in every word the former spoke, while her face assumed a puzzled air.

Nearer they came, the faint light showed up the features of both, as it streamed through the interlaced boughs, then passed onward and the weird prophetess was alone.

She dragged herself into the middle of the road, and followed Philip Deverell with her eyes until the darkness hid him from her sight.

"That voice—that voice," she muttered, "where—where? It is—it is—oh! I have forgotten!"

"She passed up the road, picked her way through the poplar woods, skirted the fetid pool and pushed open the door of her habitation, all the time muttering of Deverell."

She took the jeweled dagger from its hiding-place, put it carefully away, and tossing off her garments, flung herself upon her couch and called her cat to her.

"They say we're mad, Sancho, but we have met that man before. I should know that face; I have seen it before, but where—where? Think, Sancho, brave boy, good cat, think for me. It's all muddle here in my head. I know him—he is—pshaw! am I mad!"

CHAPTER XV.

FOR an instant, Nicholas Dopp was paralyzed.

"Vot the blazes does h'it mean? I could swear h'as 'ow I earn Frank a callin' h'out fur 'elp, but h'it's stopped now."

"Blarst h'it h'all, h'its them 'ere purtatoes h'as I heat fum me supper h'a risin' h'on me stomach. H'I've got the nightmare, that's h'all h'about h'it. Blang my blarsted buttons h'if h'ever I heats h'any more h'of th' bleedin' vegetables h'if they be goin' ter serve I like this 'ere."

"Ang h'it! I'll jest lay down h'agin h'and snatch a wink h'of sleep."

Accordingly he flung himself back upon the mat, and closed his eyes.

"Help—oh, my God, help!"

Shrill, clear, cutting like a knife, the cry rang out upon the night air, and with a sudden bound, Nick leaped to his feet.

"Blow my vescut h'if h'it h'is the purtatoes. H'it's Frank, h'and summat's th' matter."

He leaped forward and dealt the door a heavy blow with his clenched fist.

"Frank—Frank! vot's h'up? H'open the door, like a good lad, I arsk yer."

"Nick, help—"

The cry was cut short as though a heavy hand had clutched the speaker's throat, and with a yell of defiance that awoke every soul in the house, Nick ran back a few feet and flung himself against the door.

With a crash and a splinter it was hurled from its hinges, fell inward and precipitated the comedian to the floor.

The next moment he found himself in the grasp of Giovanni St. Gash, while Frank was struggling in the arms of Philip Deverell.

"Maledictions! too late!" hissed Deverell, as he caught the sound of feet hurrying along the hall; "kill the whelp, St. Gash, we must escape!"

Very considerate indeed upon the part of Mr. Philip Deverell, but Giovanni St. Gash was spared the trouble of following his instructions by the whelp in question dealing him a heavy blow under the ear, and sending him sprawling towards the open window.

Bang—bang—bang! rang forth the pistols the comedian had fortified himself with, but in the excitement, the bullets flew wide of the mark.

There was a ladder against the window, and with a blood-curdling oath, Giovanni St. Gash leaped upon this, and shouted to Deverell:

"Come, wea bea de capture!"

The next instant, a crowd headed by Harry Arlington, burst into the room.

He saw Deverell as he was in the act of escaping, sprang forward, snatched a loaded pistol from Nick, and leveled it at him.

Quick as a flash, the desperate man grabbed our hero from the bed and leaped upon the window-sill, holding him up before him as a shield.

"Why don't you shoot?" he cried, exultantly. "You held the best hand a while ago, now it is my turn! Shoot, fire if you dare, for your bullets will only reach my heart through his!"

CHAPTER XVI.

WITH the reader's attention and permission, return we now to Philip Deverell and the villainous Italian, whom last we saw flying up the road to escape the bullets of the actor's son; although be it remembered he had refused to shoot at the former, after hearing the bond of relationship existing between them.

The knowledge that Philip Deverell was his uncle, had been bitter indeed to Frank Sparkle, but he choked down his sentiments upon that score, and wisely forbore mentioning them to either Harvey Arlington or Nicholas Dopp.

"Oh, my God!" was his thought, "that this bond of blood should forbid me slaying my father's assassin. Why did I ever hear it, or hearing it, why was I not made less sensitive? Blood revolted against blood in the days of Adam and Eve, but a curse followed it! I cannot punish him, but the law shall. Step by step I will follow him to death itself, and scourge his life into nothingness with the scaffold rope!"

Still, with this sentiment in his heart, he wore a smiling face, and his white lips framed other words.

But this silent thought was an oath, and Frank Sparkle mentally resolved to keep it, if he did not express it orally.

The actor's son was one of those boy-men whose life, hazarded upon the die, would never relinquish his resolve, be it years in coming. History records great reasoning from youthful minds, and, although I do not hold my hero up as a god, and say: "Here, look at him; is he not brave? Follow in his footsteps," I do maintain that his better sentiments, respecting the bonds of relationship, and his undying love for parents and friends, are such as would well befit the youth of our country, irrespective of the social scale, to emulate.

How Frank and Arlington encountered Dopp on the journey homeward is already known to the reader, as is the scene in our hero's room, but return we to Deverell, and ascertain how he gained admittance there.

Where the dark, wood-fringed pathway forked out from the road proper, Philip came upon St. Gash, who was crouching back in the brushwood and glaring up and down the passage.

When, however, he caught sight of Deverell, he sprang up and bounded to his side.

"*Sacra!* the saints bea de bless! Youa area de safe. Maledictions ona de whelp, Ia cr-rusha hima yet!"

He lifted his clenched fist in the air as he spoke, and his dark, satanic face wore a look of repulsive rage.

Philip Deverell wheeled and faced him, his distorted features white as ashes.

"Crush!" he fairly hissed, "crush! You talk thus; let me but close these fingers on his throat, and by the demons who prate of vengeance, I'll not relinquish my hold till the last drop of blood forsakes his body and lays him lifeless at my feet. As for this man, this Harvey Arlington, no martyr on the rack, in one whole day of torture, ever felt the pangs I'll crowd into one minute for him!"

"Curse him—curse him—curse him! Whence came he? Who is he? And, above all, that hideous secret of my dark past, that awful specter of my bitter future and horrible present, how knows he that?"

"Has hell, in which I so long trusted, turned back upon me in this, my needy hour? I meant to slay this boy before he learned the secret of my enmity; now it must be done, and without delay, though I peril my neck in accomplishing it. I hate him, oh, Satan, I hate him!"

"Ay, youa hate!" foamed Giovanni, "but ifa youa lofed him, I woulda not spare hima de now."

"Twice has he baffled me—Ia canna de hit him, but Ia willa yet—Ia willa yet, d—him! Ia nevair meesa ma mark beafore, and it makes my blood boil to doa so now!"

Dear as was Philip Deverell's vengeance to him, dearer, far dearer to Giovanni was his

reputation as knife thrower, and his failure, while it embittered him, urged him on to eventually accomplish the unhallowed task.

He was about to speak again, but Deverell held up his hand warningly, and bent forward in the attitude of listening.

"Hiss!" he said, "I hear their voices; they are coming up the road."

"Cursa, Ia paya him now!" hissed the Italian, leaping forward with clenched fists.

With one bound Philip Deverell reached his side and grasped his arm.

"Are you mad, St. Gash? Back—back to shelter or we peril ourselves. We must work silently. 'Sh-h!' they are coming; we will track them home and force an entrance to the boy's apartment."

"He once put out of the way it is an easy task to slay this Arlington, and close thus the only mouth that can give out my secret. Back—back, I say!"

By main force he drew the Italian back into the brushwood; but not a moment too soon, for scarcely had they well concealed themselves ere Frank and Arlington came up the road and passed within a foot of them on their way to the hotel.

On went the young actor and his new-found friend, and on too went the two plotters not a dozen yards in their rear.

They saw the meeting between Frank and Nick, but carefully slipping along in the shadow of the trees they followed the trio until the hotel was reached.

When the door closed upon them, Deverell came forward.

"Hiss! St. Gash."

"Well?" asked Giovanni, coming forward to his side.

"They have gone in; quick, let us get within the grounds. We can easily tell which room he occupies by the light. Come!"

Silently striding forward, they grasped the palings, and vaulting lightly over them, found themselves within the grounds surrounding the hotel.

Stealthily as the noiseless footfalls of sin they crept around to the side of the house.

At that instant a light flashed up in one of the windows and the shadow of a man was limned upon the curtain.

It was Harvey Arlington.

Deverell ground his teeth and shook his fist at the shadow.

"I do not want you yet," he hissed, "but the day will come—"

A low exclamation from Giovanni attracted his attention, and he turned quickly to see the Italian bending over something lying on the grass.

"What's up?"

"Look, a ladder."

Deverell was about to make reply, but at that very instant another light flashed up, and Frank Sparkle threw up his window to admit the night air.

They could see his shadow as he disrobed, then the light went out again, and all was darkness.

Crouching back in the shadow, the men awaited the time to strike.

An hour passed.

"Now!" muttered Deverell, gliding forward.

They raised the ladder against the house, and with his foot on the lower rung, Philip turned and whispered:

"I will strangle him—it is clean and sure."

Then the two forms glided upward like shadows, lifted the curtain and slipped into the apartment where Frank Sparkle lay sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER XVII.

TIPTOEING his way to the couch, Philip Deverell bent over the sleeping boy.

He lay upon his back, one arm flung over his head, and his thick curls tumbled over his forehead.

St. Gash stood at the window; one hand drew back the curtain, and allowed the moonlight to stream in upon the sleeper.

"Sleep," muttered Deverell, bending over the boy. "Sleep on, for you will never wake."

He drew up his sleeves, placed one knee upon the bed, and bending down, gripped Frank's throat.

With a quick start the boy awoke, but the hard, bony fingers closed tighter upon his throat, and as he struggled to free himself, the villain planted his knee upon his chest and pinned him down.

"Ah!" gasped our hero, and that cry Nicholas Dopp heard from the hallway without,

and as he shouted back to him, Frank spluttered forth:

"Nick—help! I—"

But the hard fingers pressed tighter and tighter. He felt his strength leaving him, while in his ears rang the din of approaching aid.

Livid with rage, the desperate man toiled on, and then it was the door was burst inward, and the crowd surged into the apartment.

What followed is already known to the reader.

With that living shield held up before him as he stood in the open window, Philip Deverell defied Arlington, laughed him to scorn, and bade him shoot if he dared.

Harvey's arm fell, and he groaned brokenly: "Oh, God! I had not thought of that. I dare not fire—I dare not fire!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came back the villain's triumphant laugh; "are you palsied—are your bullets no deadlier than your hatred? My soul to him who can take the boy from me!"

"I can fill that bill!" shrieked Nick, as he sprang forward and flung his arms around Frank's neck; "now, then, go fur 'em, Mr. Harlinton! Spile 'is booty an' bust 'is figger-ed ter pie-stuffins! Ooray!"

"Curse you, let go!" foamed Deverell, releasing one hand and aiming a blow at the comedian's face. "Let go, I say!"

With one wrench, Nicholas Dopp pulled the boy from his grasp and Deverell stood uncovered in the casement.

Crack! rang forth the report of a pistol, and with a shriek of pain, Philip Deverell slipped back upon the ladder as Harvey Arlington hurled the smoking weapon from him and bounded to the window.

The shot had made a flesh wound in Deverell's left arm, but as his enemy bent over the sill, he plunged forth his right fist, and striking him squarely between his eyes, bowled him over backward.

His head struck the bedstead, and he fell to the floor, senseless and blood-stained, while in his ears rang the cry:

"Living I hate you, dead I curse you! You are my prey, and the time will come!"

He darted wildly down the ladder as he spoke.

"Quick! to ther garding and seccor 'im!" cried Nick, as he darted to Arlington and raised his head, he having laid the senseless Frank upon the bed.

Like a pack of hungry wolves, the others crowded to the garden, but the ladder was pulled down and the two desperate men had disappeared.

They searched the grounds thoroughly, but they had made good use of their time and not a trace of them could be found.

Disappointed with their luck, for the rough westerners would surely have lynched the men had they found them, they retraced their steps to the young actor's chamber.

By this time Frank had recovered from the effects of the struggle, and was busily engaged in helping Nick, who was striving to restore Arlington to consciousness.

The wound in the man's head was a desperate one.

The force of the blow had fairly ripped away the back portion of the scalp, and exposed the bare, blood-stained bone to view.

He lay like a lump of clay in their arms, his half-open eyes gazing vacantly up at the ceiling.

"Send at once for a physician," said Frank, as the man returned.

"There's one in the house," spoke up the landlord. "He is on the top floor; No. 20."

A man left the scene and returned shortly after with the physician, who was one of the many graduates who picked up a living in those times by traveling from town to town.

He washed the wound with a sponge, sewed and strapped it without speaking a word.

When this was done, he demanded the man to be taken to his own room and put to bed.

"Is he wound so dangerous, sir?" asked Frank, alarmed at his request.

The doctor shook his head, and said:

"Yes, very. As it is, it will be weeks before he can be removed, and I am afraid of inflammation."

Poor Frank! he watched them bear the man away and sat down on his bed to think.

What changes had the last twenty-four hours wrought in his career?

"Oh, if he dies!" he moaned. "He said I should know all on the morrow and he alone

can reveal the secret of my life. Oh, Philip Deverell, you have much to account for!"

He knew he could do nothing, still he sat up beside the man all night and listened to his wild, incoherent ravages.

Harvey Arlington's skin was very dark, his face smothered in a thick beard, and once, as Frank bent over him, he saw that this was dyed—more, his skin, too, was stained. There was evidently some reason for this disguise, but why?

The news of the attack spread like wild-fire, and seats the next night at the Portable Theater were at a premium.

Loudly and long the applause swelled forth as Sparkle made his appearance, and for the nonce, he was a veritable hero.

Still his thoughts were all with Harry Arlington, and once in the midst of the tragedy, he caught himself saying:

"Oh, will he die!"

Thrice he missed his cue, until Nicholas Dopp upbraided him and bade him forget his own troubles in those of Romeo.

He profited by the comedian's advice, and being a true son of Thespis, shook off his woes and imagined himself the person he was enacting. "Lazy actors!" the world calls them, but no portion of the human race has to endure so much for sustenance, and put those in their places who call them thus, pick out the energetic ones, and you will find them these same lazy actors. No class of people are so misjudged. What a mockery is their life! Heart-breaking, brain-bursting, but all smiles to the people before. Oh, the injustice makes me sick!

The play was over, the stand broken, and the theater to be moved that night to Lima, where the company would follow on the next morning.

On their way home to the hotel, Frank accosted Hugh Trugold.

"Mr. Trugold," he said, "I am sorry, but I must sever my connection with your company to-night."

"But, my dear boy, you are billed in Lima—it will ruin me. What is the cause of this sudden resolve? Have I not always acted fairly with you?"

"Oh, yes, sir, and indeed, I am very grateful; but that poor fellow who lies at the hotel cannot be neglected. Remember, he was injured in defending me."

"Nobly said, Frank; but you must also remember that he cannot remain there without money."

"True—I had forgotten that. But I will work in the hotel for his board."

"Indeed it will not be sufficient. Go on with the company; I will double your salary, and you can then send money weekly to pay for his attendance until he is able to join you."

At first Frank was marble to this appeal, but Nick joined Trugold in it, and he eventually succumbed to numbers and consented to go.

He made arrangements for Arlington to be well cared for, and left a week's board in advance.

The next morning the company started.

Stealing into Arlington's room, Frank bent over him, and with tears in his eyes, murmured:

"You promised I should know all to-day, but I will never forget your kindness. Good-by. God bless you and restore you to health!"

Half an hour after he was thundered along the rails, being rapidly divided from the man who knew the secret of his life, and whom he might never see again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ride between Piqua and Lima is not an extensive "jump," to use a theatrical term, and the company arrived there without adventure.

They put up at a house kept by an old Frenchman named Largarette, which house, if I mistake not, was called the "Westerner," and was removed about twenty yards from the corner now occupied by the "Burnet."

Monsieur Largarette was a man of education, but the tricky jade, Fortune, had played him scurvy capers. He was a widower, a droll matter-of-fact fellow, but somewhat eccentric. I remember once, monsieur asked me whether I desired coffee or tea, and feeling in a jocular mood, I replied, "Both." Judge of my disgust upon sipping from the

cup brought before me, I found that he had mixed both together.

I pushed it from me and said:

"Give me a cup of coffee well sweetened."

Monsieur raised his voice and shouted:

"Elsie, a vase of the sedative well supplied with the saccharine."

But I digress.

The town was heavily billed and unusual excitement prevailed.

Large posters and two sheet heads representing Frank, were displayed throughout the town, and the band paraded the streets all day long, to the intense delight of the simple townfolk.

The fair at Lima was to last a week, and for that time the show was billed—"six performances only."

The first night was a repetition of our hero's triumphs elsewhere, and, to quote Hugh Trugold: "The people went mad over them."

The second night came and went; the third performance passed, and retiring to his dressing-room, Frank changed his dress to his street costume.

Nick Dopp was there awaiting him, for, after that dreadful experience at Piqua, they were never separated—even rooming together.

Arm in arm they passed on toward the hotel, and when about midway something rustled past them.

"What's that?" cried Frank, coming to a standstill, and wheeling around.

Something whizzed past his head and fell with a sharp clank upon the stones.

It was a stiletto!

Nick turned pale, grasped his arm, and hurried onward.

"Come!" he said, "them 'ere willuns is h'on yer track. Yer got a charmed life, Frank, but don't tempt fate!"

They hurried on to the hotel, and passed in.

Frank was nervous, for the knife plainly betokened the presence of his enemies, but he said nothing to Nick.

They bade the company good-night, and passed on up the stairs.

As they reached the first landing, they saw by the moonlight streaming through a window at the rear, a tall, mantled figure barring their onward passage.

"Lord ha' mercy!" gasped Nick; "h'it's a sperit!"

"Ha—ha—ha!" came back in chilling tones from the mantled figure. "You are a Sparkle, I hate the name—I hate the name!"

CHAPTER XIX.

MAD HAGAR did not leave the hut by Elkton Pool for some days after her visit to the portable theater.

When, however, she did so, she kissed Sancho, the cat, good-bye, and after carefully barring the door, but not from any fear of intrusion, for the simple townfolk would as willingly have gone into the open jaws of a furnace as past her threshold,—she strode on up through the poplar woods, vaulted over the gate and passed leisurely down the main road.

She reached the space where the theater had stood, and drew back with a cry of surprise.

There were the marks where the beams had been erected, but the theater itself was gone.

A grayish pallor overspread the woman's face as she stood there in the sunlight and gazed at the debris left by the strolling players.

Motionless as a block of marble she remained for a moment, and when she could find voice for utterance, muttered slowly:

"He has escaped me! He was a Sparkle, and I would have wrested from his bosom the hiding-place of that other who bears the same name and whom he must know. Oh, ye furies! if he is dead. No—no—no! Heaven could not be so cruel; we shall meet again—we must!"

"This boy, his face—his voice is the echo of one I knew in the clouded past, and that one was Dev—Dev—pshaw! my memory plays me odd tricks; I can remember nothing. All faces—all voices are dead save one, and that is ever before me. It is here—here!" she went on, beating her clenched fist upon her white forehead, "in traces of fire that scorch my very brain! I hate him bitterly."

"Bitterly! Ay, that's the word; bitterly as the memory of bygone happiness and youth to the aged, when the world has tossed them about like dead leaves or rotten fruit."

Then her chin sank upon her breast, a film gathered before her eyes, and she stood there in the mellow light of the warm sun, lost in visions of the past and dead to the world around her.

For a moment only this silent struggle went on in her breast, then the long fingers locked convulsively over her heart, her thin, bloodless lips drew tightly together, and her black eyes twinkled like "evil orbs."

"They have gone," she murmured, and this strange boy with them; yet I will follow them to the end of the world, but I will find the man I seek! Now to work, Hagar, like a viper. Viper! Ay, that's the word; low, cunning, creeping viper be it then. But the first move; I must find where these players have gone. Yet how?"

She paused for a moment and thought.

Suddenly her face lit up, and she started onward, muttering as she went:

"The hotel; that's the place. There they must know."

This thought was a good one, for the hotel-keeper usually does know—to his cost. But no ill luck had caused the company to "fly by night," like the witches in Macbeth, and arriving at the hotel, the prophetess passed hastily in.

"Who keeps this place?" she asked, abruptly, of a lout lying back on a rickety chair and seemingly having no other duty than to expectorate copious streams of tobacco juice over the floor.

The fellow looked up and drawled:

"It keeps itself, but if you mean who runs the mercheen, why it's Stayman, the black-bearded man you see yonder."

Without a word, Hagar turned upon her heel and strode over to the person indicated.

"Are you Mr. Stayman?"

"Well, I calkerlate I be."

"Did the theatrical company just gone, stop here?"

"Guess they did, aunty."

"Do you know where they are now?"

"Reckon I dew. If they got thar safe, they be in Lima, a bit up the road."

"Good!"

As abruptly as she had entered, the weird woman turned away and left—turned away to seek the man she most wished to meet, and never knew how near they were together.

Muttering and jabbering to herself, the strange fortune-teller bent her footsteps in the direction of Elkton pool and soon found herself home.

Going over to the wide chimney place, she sat down and called Sancho to her.

The feline ran up, leaped into her lap, and arching its back, began purring loudly.

Hagar patted his black head.

"Sancho," she said, softly, "we are on his track, we shall find him yet, and soon too. You've never seen him, boy, but I know him and one day you shall feast on him as upon the one above stairs there. I'm going to Lima to find this boy who bears his name, and if I have to cut his heart out, I will find what he knows of him. Be a good boy while I am gone, and watch the house. Now bring my shawl."

The cat leaped down with a lusty cry, and seizing a black shawl in his sharp teeth, dragged it to his mistress.

She laid some food and water beside the fire, and after straining Sancho to her bosom, put him from her.

Falling upon her knees on the hearth, she counted the bricks from the wall, and having arrived at the one she wished, inserted her fingers beneath it and lifted it up.

A deep space thus revealed was seen to be full of coin, the proceeds of her fortune-telling expeditions.

She took out a handful, counted it, and poured it into her capacious pocket.

This done, she kissed Sancho once more, and then left the hut.

With the black shawl drawn over her head and shoulders, she glided on through the town, reached the railroad station, and was soon thundering away on the track of the actor's son, for such we will still call him, since by this title he is best known to us.

At dusk she reached Lima, and was overjoyed to see the company billed throughout the town.

That night she went to the theater, and followed the company home to the hotel to ascertain where they were stopping.

She arrived there before Frank, and at once engaged a room.

Worn out by excitement, she plunged her-

self upon her couch; her eyes closed, and when next she woke, the sunlight was streaming into the room.

It was broad day.

She sprang up with a cry of alarm, and glanced around.

"Furies!" she hissed, "I have been sleeping. I should have seen him last night, but I will this."

She took her meals in her room, and, at night, watched for Frank's return.

She heard his footstep on the stair as he came in with Nicholas Dopp, and flinging the black shawl over her head, leaped out into the hallway and faced him.

Of this meeting we are aware.

As our hero caught the words: "You are a Sparkle; I hate the name!" he took a step forward.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

"And who are you?" came back the reply of the mantled woman. "Know you another of your name?"

Nick grasped the young tragedian's arm to pull him away, but Frank shook him off and answered:

"Yes; a man of years. From him I took my name, but he was not my father."

"Ah!" gasped Hagar, pulling down the sable mantle so that it concealed her face and stepping quickly forward, "know you who is?"

"If you are an emissary of his brother, the man who seeks to deprive me of my rights, go—tell him I defy him, and dare to call myself a Deverell!"

With a cry of surprise the mad woman drew back.

"Deverell! ay, that's the name I strove to recall. Harold Deverell was his friend; his child must know where he is. Speak, boy, speak! Where is he?"

"He, who?"

"The man I seek—Samuel Sparkle!"

"You seek him?" cried Frank, recoiling as he spoke; "find him among the dead!"

"It is a lie!" hissed Hagar, leaping forward, "he lives; the furies have told me so. Tell me where he is, or I will strangle you where you stand!"

Her fingers clutched around the throat of the brave boy and bore him backward to the floor.

The instant Nicholas Dopp realized his friend's peril, shivering as he was with fear, he whipped out one of his pistols, and without taking aim fired at the veiled figure, which neither knew to be a woman, fired at her.

But excitement caused the bullet to fly wide of its mark, and the moment Hagar heard the report, she flung the young actor from her.

The noise echoed and re-echoed through the hallway, and a minute after, it was filled with people.

"What's up?"

"What's the matter?"

"Who fired?"

"Is any one hurt?"

Frank leaped to his feet, while the excited people were crowding around Nick, who still grasped the smoking pistol, and glanced hurriedly around.

The mantled figure had disappeared!

CHAPTER XX.

THE door of Mad Hagar's room opened upon the landing where she had encountered the young actor, and the moment she flung Frank from her, under cover of the darkness, she pushed open this door and glided like a spirit into the apartment.

Again the questioning was commenced, and Frank found himself compelled to recount the story of the strange meeting.

"Whether it was a man or a woman, I cannot say," he went on; "but be it who it may, the person stood there by the window and was shrouded most effectually in a dark mantle that fell all around the form."

"Mantle!" cried M. Lagarette, elbowing his way to our hero's side; "monsieur, did I understand you to say that the person was coovaire in ze foldts oof a dark mantle?"

"You certainly did, M. Lagarette," replied Frank, wheeling around and facing the excited Little Frenchman.

"*Mon Dieu!* and would monsieur know ze face, if monsieur see it once moor?"

The young actor shook his head.

"I have already said it was too dark to discern if it had been a man or a woman;

therefore, monsieur will see that it is quite impossible for me to recognize the face even were we to meet again."

M. Lagarette wrung his hands in despair.

"*Je ne sais pas ce que je deviendrai ou ce que je vais devenir!*" he moaned. "I am von ruined man. It vill all get out zat zere ees von ghost in my house, and no von will coom to ze place. Oh, monsieur, ees zere not zoom vay vat you coot—vat you call him—recognize ze persong?"

"Yes, one," returned our hero; "I should know the voice again, should I hear it."

At that moment Pierre, Monsieur Lagarette's son, came upon the scene, and inquired what caused the disturbance.

Of course monsieur felt in duty bound to explain all, which he did, interlarding his speech with French adjectives, and talking as fast as a Massachusetts groceryman.

"A mantle!" repeated Pierre, like his father, "zat is so easily proven. You were not in ze office ven I let No. 6 to a femme in a black mantle. Zere ees ze room—zere."

He pointed as he spoke to the door of Hagar's apartment, and following the direction of his finger with his eye, Frank said, quickly:

"That is the place where the stranger stood. Had it not been for Mr. Dopp's presence I should undoubtedly have been strangled, for the person was endowed with more than ordinary strength."

Without a moment's delay, the whole party rushed to the door, and hammered loudly on the panels.

"What want you?" cried Hagar from within.

Frank Sparkle started.

"That's the voice!" he cried, and the next instant the men burst in the door.

A candle was burning on a shelf, and still wrapped in her black shawl and clutching the jeweled hilt of the stage dagger, Hagar stood in the center of the apartment.

Monsieur Lagarette made a dash forward, but the keen blade flashed ominously in the dim light.

"Back, all of you!" shrieked the mad woman, her black eyes gleaming like living coals. "The first who lays a hand on me, dies like a dog! I want him—I must have Samuel Sparkle, and the furies have told me that we shall meet! A boy, an actor, a Deverell told me he was dead, but it's false, he has hidden him, and I'll yet wring the secret from his black heart. Oh, for blood to drown him!"

"The world is wide—the world is dark, but it shall be black for him who dares approach me, or stand 'twixt me and my revenge! Living I will find him; dead, I'll drag him from the very jaws of the tomb, and be his form reeking with decay, Sancho shall feed upon his accursed body!"

Again Monsieur Lagarette sprang forward.

The brilliant blade flashed quickly downward, and cut through the flesh of his right arm, making a ghastly-looking stab, from which the blood flowed copiously.

"You have dared to defy me," shrieked the prophetess, "and the blow is stricken! Fiends! are you all heartless! Why do you hide this Samuel Sparkle from me? Step by step through the whole wide world I will follow him, and who dares to stay me? I seek—I seek—"

Her eyes fell upon Frank, she leaped forward, wound her left hand in his hair, and with that more than human power of a maniac, dragged him to her feet, and hissed:

"You!"

The glittering knife, its luster bedimmed with Gaspard Lagarette's blood, leaped high in the air and was poised for a deadly blow over the young actor.

"Tell me!" she shrieked, "tell me where he is, or by the black heavens above us you die as he shall! Tell me—tell me, I say, for—"

Bang!

The sharp report of a pistol—Nick Dopp had fired with good effect.

The bullet, aimed with great precision, crashed against the knife blade, shivering it in a thousand fragments and leaving the jeweled hilt in the mad woman's grasp.

The very next instant the men leaped upon her and wrested the boy free.

It is past a doubt that the weakest sane persons, when driven mad, possess a greater strength than that of ordinary persons, and this was the case with Hagar.

Right and left she hurled her adversaries from her like sticks in her path.

"Unhand me—unhand me!" she screamed,

flinging them off. "Let me go—let me go, I say! Come, furies, and help me!"

A burly fellow seized her left shoulder, but wrenching her right hand free, she dealt him what Nick Dopp afterward termed "a bugle buster," spreading his nose out over his cheeks and dashing him bleeding to the floor.

Another blow, another wrench—she is free!

"Ha, ha, ha! follow me who dares!"

With a single bound she reached the door,

banged it in their faces, and leaped into the hall.

Not a minute to lose.

The desperate men fairly wrenched the door from its hinges and dashed after her.

Her wild, awful gurgles of chilling laughter ran through the empty corridor as she darted onward to the open window where Frank had first seen her.

"Stop—stop!" screamed her pursuers, but she heeded them not.

She reached the window, leaped upon the sill, and turned for an instant to face them.

"The blood-hound is after him—who dares follow her?"

Her hands flew up suddenly above her head, the black mantle, now torn to tatters, fluttered in the gale, and with a last laugh she leaped forward into space.

The merriment rang but an instant on the air; then came a dull, heavy thud, echoed by a shriek of pain, and all was still.

"She's killed!"

"Broke her neck!"

"Now we have her!"

"Come on!"

These and various other cries mingled together as that scream of agony died out, and with one accord, the whole party made for the doorway below, which led to the road into which Hagar had leaped.

Lying in the moonlit road, her tattered robe covered with dust, her white hair dabbled in the blood that flowed from her mouth and nostrils, her white face turned up to the skies, and her black eyes dimly seen through the half-closed lids, they found her.

"Gone!" a rough voice murmured at Frank's elbow, as he pushed his way to the side of the prophetess.

"Blowed h'if she ain't croaked!" muttered Nicholas Dopp, as with Frank, he bent over the limp body.

"Hush!" returned our hero, holding up his finger, "hush! we are in a mightier presence than ours; speak no harsh words—she is dead, and her strange secret dies with her!"

Then he wound his arms around the body and lifted her from the dust.

"Lagarette," he said, "harness up your horse, she must be taken to a doctor."

Monsieur Lagarette's son, the one addressed, held up his hands in surprise.

"*Diable, monsieur!* she try to take your life, and—"

"And Heaven has taken hers," responded Frank, solemnly. "What she has done is past. Is there a doctor near?"

"*Oui, monsieur,* at the lunatic asylum, some two mile oop ze road."

"Quick then, harness up."

A few moments after, the horse and wagon were brought around to the front of the house; with Nick and Pierre, Frank lifted the bleeding form in, and drove to the asylum.

"The woman was crazy," he explained to the doctor, who was not over pleased at being pulled out of bed at this hour.

"Take her into the operation room yonder."

Tenderly the boy actor bore the limp body past the threshold and laid her on a long table.

The room was quite dark but the doctor struck a match, lit a lamp, and then threw a white sheet over the woman's body.

Then he turned and faced our heroes.

"What ails her now?" he asked abruptly.

"Had a fit and injured herself?"

Frank shook his head.

"No," he said, slowly, "in a fit of desperation she leaped from the window and we found her in the road; I think she is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the doctor, "I am not in the habit of having corpses brought here. I thought she was only in a comatose condition."

He turned to the mantel as he spoke, and lifting the lamp bore it over to the table.

With one hand he held up the light and with the other drew back the sheet.

"Humph!" that was all he said.

Frank Sparkle looked up quickly; he had cherished a hope that she might be living.

but that expressive ejaculation felt like lead upon his heart.

"She is dead?" he asked.

The doctor set down the lamp, flung the sheet over the body, and said:

"Neck broken!"

CHAPTER XXI.

HARVEY ARLINGTON'S wound was by no means as desperate as the traveling doctor had said, and the day after our hero had left Piqua, he opened his eyes in consciousness.

"Where am I?" he asked, glaring around at the girl who sat by his bedside.

"Hush! you are ill; you must not talk."

"Ill? what's the matter? What makes my head hurt so?"

"Do you not remember the fight with the man who entered Mr. Sparkle's room a few nights back?"

"Oh, yes—yes—where is he now?"

"Who? the man, sir? I don't know."

"No—no, Mr. Sparkle. Send him to me at once."

"He is gone, sir."

"Gone—gone where?"

"On to Lima with the company."

She then proceeded to tell him all that had happened, and over and over again bade him lie down and not talk. But lying down was out of question just then with Harvey Arlington, so he sat there mumbling to himself:

"Gone—gone, and I not near to protect him from Deverell. I must get well—I must!"

A strong determination to battle death often wards it off, and thus it was with Arlington, for on the evening preceding the night upon which occurred the events narrated in the foregoing chapter, the girl came to his room and found it empty.

He had arisen from his couch, dressed and stolen away.

Let us follow him on his journey.

Straight on to the depot he went, and entering the cars was rattled off to Lima.

About the time the train rumbled into the station Hagar was battling with the men in the room.

Accosting a fellow who lounged on the platform, he said:

"Can you tell me at what place the traveling actors are stopping?"

"Yes; a matter of three miles up the road there at Largette's 'Westerner.'"

"Thanks."

He turned into the road and plodded on up it.

Half an hour elapsed; a carriage came rattling up the road, and looking up quickly Arlington gave vent to a suppressed cry.

"I can't be mistaken," he muttered. "I'll follow them."

On—he went in their track, till the carriage stopped and the three figures emerged, bearing a dark bundle, and passed into the house in front of them.

Gliding forward Arlington followed.

* * * * *

"It is too true, then, she is dead, doctor?"

"Yes, past a doubt."

Frank had turned to go, but with a sudden resolution he turned back to the table, removed the sheet and lifted up the blood-stained head.

At that instant a shrill cry awoke a dozen echoes in the hall, the door was thrust open, and a figure tottered in.

Frank lifted his eyes, saw the man and cried:

"Mr. Arlington!"

The man noted it not, but rushed past him, knelt beside the dead woman and moaned:

"Thank God I can face the world once more! I am not an assassin! Now, Philip Deverell, look to yourself, for I'll hunt you down! O, God, my Hagar!"

"What do you mean?" cried Frank.

"That woman is my wife, who loved you as a babe, but whom I thought I had murdered!"

"Merciful powers!" gasped our hero, "and you are—"

"The man who reared and loved you always as a father—Sam Sparkle!"

CHAPTER XXII.

FRANK SPARKLE threw up his arms and staggered back as though shot.

"You—you Samuel Sparkle?" he cried.

"Often have I tried to place your features, but—but—"

Harvey Arlington turned his face towards him.

"But what?" he asked, lowly, laying one hand on the brow of the dead woman. "You think me younger, Frank, my boy, is not that it?"

"Yes," replied the young actor. "If you are Samuel Sparkle, you should be at the least, fifty years of age. Your hair—your beard—"

"Should be white! Exactly. But have you forgotten that there is such a thing as dye? When the stain is from my face and hair, when my beard is gone, perhaps the likeness will not be so hard to trace. You have been as good to me as though you had indeed been my child; come, Frank, to these arms that so long have yearned to embrace you, and say you have not forgotten the poor old man who has loved you better than life itself!"

"Father—father!" cried Frank, throwing himself upon the old comedian's breast, "for such you will ever be to me, how much worse than ungrateful I would be, could I ever forget your kindness."

"I never knew a parent's watchful care other than yours, and come what may, you shall never know other than a son's love from me!"

Tears trickled freely down the old man's cheeks.

"God bless you—God bless you!" he cried. "You are indeed a true son."

As for Nicholas Dopp, he flung his hat in the air, capered around like a madman, and shouted at the top of his lungs:

"H'oh, s'elp me proper! Cum ter me h'arms, me cheyild, h'and eving bless yer. 'Ooray!"

Frank raised his hand.

"Hush, Nick," he said, solemnly. "We must not forget we are in the presence of death."

At the mention of Mad Hagar, Samuel Sparkle wept afresh, and turning to him, our hero inquired:

"How was it I never knew your wife was living? How was it you escaped from the flames at the Bowery Theater?"

The old comedian then proceeded to relate the story of the Italian's terrible mistake, all of which is already known to the reader; therefore, we will pass it by and pick up the thread where it will be a revelation to us.

"When I fell back in the flames," went on Sparkle, "it was more from the force and suddenness of the blow than real pain, for I did not imagine myself so badly injured as I was. Still I lost consciousness, and the fire soon after revived me, and I sought escape from a side door."

"While endeavoring to extricate myself from a heap of ruins a falling brick struck me upon the head, and I fell in a senseless heap to the floor."

"It appears a fireman saw me fall and saved me, for I remember no more until my eyes opened with reason within the walls of a hospital, whither I had been brought."

"As soon as I was able I left the place and went to Mrs. Brophy's. You were gone. She showed me your letter and told me of two men who had been there inquiring for you."

"From the description I knew them to be Philip Deverell and the Italian, Giovanni St. Gash. I knew there was danger, and prepared to follow you under the assumed name of Harvey Arlington."

"You know already how I came up with you—how my timely arrival saved you from the deadly blow of the Italian, and the no less deadly hatred of your uncle."

"My uncle! Yes, you promised to tell me of him and of myself," added Frank. "Pray go on, and like Hamlet, 'let me not burst in ignorance.'"

Harvey Arlington smiled feebly.

"Like Hamlet," he repeated. "Ay, the simile is good, for like him, you are the victim of an uncle's malice towards his brother. But I must begin at the commencement:

"When quite young—not more than twenty-five—and my way to fame lying open before me, I fell in with a Spanish actress, one Hagar D'Lavernti. I will not say that I was madly in love with the woman; her genius, her masterly rendition of different characters fired my blood, and when I saw that I was not distasteful to her, I grew bolder, and in an evil hour offered myself and was accepted."

"In the profession I was looked upon as a

devilish lucky fellow, and in my mad infatuation, I fancied I was."

"But Signora D'Lavernti was not the spotless angel I imagined her to be, although I did not find this out until it was too late."

"She was surrounded by the greatest and richest men of the day, and among these were two young fellows, brothers, named Deverell, the eldest, Harold, not more than eighteen, but their money gave them place with older men."

"The younger brother, Philip, was deep and crafty—I never liked him, but with the free-hearted, good-natured, impulsive Harold I soon became a fast friend and an inseparable companion."

"Thus matters went on for three years, at the end of which time old Deverell died, leaving all his money to his eldest and favorite son."

"Philip Deverell was madly jealous of Harold, and my instinct told me if a favorable chance presented itself, he would not scruple to put him out of the way to obtain the wealth he coveted, although Harold shared equally with him in all things."

"A few months after—some seven or eight—I married the woman to whom I was engaged, but both having profitable engagements, we remained in New York, where my darling little Ethel was born."

"The Deverells were still our visitors, and one night, when my daughter was but three years of age, Harold came to me brimful of the blissful tidings that he also was a father."

"I knew not of his marriage, but a few words sufficed to tell me that my only sister was and had been his wife for more than a year."

"I was overjoyed, but the gladness was not for long, for three days after the birth of her son, my sister Kate died."

"Harold was almost crazed with grief, but the child was still left him by a merciful providence."

"About this time I learned that all was not with me as I had thought, and quarrels between myself and wife were of frequent occurrence."

"I determined to leave the city—to travel—and take my wife from the society with which she was surrounded."

"The Deverells followed us, (the child being left behind), but I speedily saw that I had brought with me the very viper from whom I would escape—Philip."

"In the roadway one night, I quarreled with Hagar before the brothers and mad with jealousy, struck her, as I then thought, dead at my feet."

"At the same instant Philip Deverell plunged a knife into the heart of his brother, and as I turned upon him, he pointed to the body of my wife and said:

"We are quits! Dare to betray me and you go to the scaffold!"

"Monster!" I cried. "I will deliver myself up to see you punished for the murder of a man whose every impulse was good and true!"

"Ah, how well he had plotted!"

"He laughed at me, pointed to the bloody knife, which was one of my stage properties and bore my name on the hilt."

"One word!" he hissed, "and I summon aid to arrest you for this double murder!"

"God pity me! I was in his power and could do nothing. He disposed of the bodies, and it was agreed that I was to take Harold's child and make away with it, thus leaving the path to the Deverell gold free and untrammelled for him."

"The son of Harold was sent to me, but I fled with it, though a few days after my little Ethel disappeared and left me a childless father and a wifeless husband."

"My heart yearned to the little orphan; I did not slay him; I sent him away to school as my own son, and after many years came back to New York."

"Season after season dragged by; I saw nothing of Philip Deverell until, by some strange chance, he learned that the boy was living, divined the trick I had played upon him, and sought me out on the very night of that child's debut."

"Wealth now awaits Frank Deverell, and now that I know the blow did not kill my wife, only injured her reason, give me your hand, boy, we will regain it together."

"You know me now as Samuel Sparkle, I know you as Frank Deverell, the heir to millions, but once and always my child—The Actor's Son!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

As Samuel Sparkle ceased speaking, he bent down, kissed the cold forehead of the dead woman, and with a low sob, reverently replaced the sheet to shut out the hideous sight of those wide-open eyes staring blankly at space, sightless here, but in another world endowed with immortal vision.

"You have suffered much," said Frank, "but God willing, all our trials are over. Let me but gain my inheritance, and you and faithful old Nick, here, shall pass the rest of your days with me in my home."

Sam Sparkle strained the boy once more to his heart and arose from his position beside his dead wife.

"Come," he said, "we must get to the hotel now. On the morrow Hagar must be buried."

They obtained permission to leave her at the insane asylum and passed out to the carriage.

As they rumbled down the road, two figures sprang into the thicket, but not before the eagle eye of the old comedian had recognized them both.

"Drive like mad!" he shrieked to Frank, and as the vehicle spun down the dusty track, he sprang up and shouted:

"You have played your cards badly, Philip Deverell. I am not a murderer, the rightful heir is in my hands at last, and here goes for New York and happiness!"

To this inflammatory oration, Nicholas Dopp added an addenda in the shape of a lusty:

"Ooray for Sparkle h'and Dopp! Tigur!"

Crack! The sharp report of a pistol, and uttering a shrill cry of pain, Samuel Sparkle fell back in the seat, the blood oozing from a ghastly wound in his breast.

"Dad, are you wounded?" gasped Frank, dropping the reins and springing to the old comedian's side.

"Dad, are you hurt?"

The old man nodded his head, and replied, feebly:

"Ay, lad, to the death. Drive—drive like mad to the magistrate. I've got my last dose, but I mustn't shuffle off till my story is on paper. Drive—drive! Oh, my God, how it burns!"

Nicholas Dopp seized the reins and urged the horse down the road towards the hotel, while our hero held the wounded man in his

arms and strove to stay the terrible flow of blood.

But the task was useless.

"Is it bad, dad?" sobbed Frank, as he saw how rapidly the old man was sinking. "Is it bad?"

"You know what *Mercutio* says, my boy, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve! Drive on! Oh, for the love of Heaven, drive—drive!"

On—on flew the horse; they reached the door of the "Westerner," and here Nicholas Dopp sprang out.

"Where h'is the 'ouse h'of the magistrate?" he cried to Gaspard Largette, who, with others, stood at the door awaiting their return.

"Zere at ze toop oof ze heel; ze ferst house."

Up again leaped Nick, and away tore the vehicle at lightning speed, never stopping until the door of the house indicated was reached.

In due time they were ushered into the magistrate's presence, he having been aroused from his bed, and the facts of the case were stated.

The dying man was propped up in a chair, the words fell slowly from his lips, and were accompanied by the sobs of Frank and the scratch of the pen, as the magistrate recorded them.

The last word was written—Frank's right to the inheritance was proven—then the paper was pushed forward, a pen pressed into the stiffening fingers of the dying man, and, held up by Frank, he wrote his name:

"Samuel Sparkle."

The final "e" was written; the fingers slipped, the pen dropped to the floor, and with a great sigh of relief the faithful old comedian sank back into the chair—dead!

On the following day officers were put upon the track of Deverell and St. Gash, and after a lusty ride came up with them in a bit of woodland some three miles beyond the road.

A tough fight, in which Giovanni St. Gash was killed, ensued, and after much trouble Philip Deverell was escorted to prison under a strong guard, and thence sent to New York for trial.

Frank and Dopp remained long enough to bid farewell to Hugh Trugold, then with the bodies of Hagar and Samuel Sparkle, followed him.

The bones in the hut of Hagar were discovered fully a year afterwards, but Philip Deverell never betrayed himself by telling that he had stolen the comedian's child and given it to its mother, who, in her wild fury, slew it; and so to the world that ever remained a mystery—doubly sealed when both were buried.

* * * * *

Philip Deverell's trial was a short one, and with the double murder and the burning of the Bowery Theater at his back, he did not look for mercy, but his face paled, his form shook, as he arose to view the jury returning. There was an instant's ghostly silence.

A word from the judge, and then the reply of the foreman:

"Guilty!"

ADDENDA.

READER, the task is done, the end is reached. A few more words and we lay down the pen, happy if we have wielded it to satisfaction and pleasure.

Frank Deverell regained the wealth of his father with but little trouble, and to-day he holds it, but not alone.

Enough was settled upon Nick to keep him comfortable, but he could never stifle his love for the roving life of a player, and continues still to fill that role.

The sharers of Frank Deverell's wealth are a lovely wife and a blue-eyed baby boy, whom he has named after the man who lost his life for him—Samuel Sparkle Deverell.

We look in upon him once for the last time before we say good-by.

He sits alone in his study. A door opens softly; a servant has entered with a paper in his hand.

"Well?" asks Frank.

"The paper you sent me for, sir."

Very pale he turns as he rises from the chair, and takes the sheet from the man.

He looks at it once, falls back into the chair and casts the paper away; but, lying as it does upon the floor, we can read the bold, black letters that have startled him:

"EXTRA!
"FULL ACCOUNT OF THE EXECUTION OF
PHILIP DEVERELL."

[THE END.]

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